

Addicted to Noise articles!

PASTSPEAK

1995. One of the first attempts to be on the ground floor of this whole "Hey! We can do cool things on the internet!"-thing was Addicted to Noise. Heck, it was perhaps *the* first online rock/music magazine. AtN, as it was known, had columnists up the wazoo, and it's staff interviewed wave-cresting Guided By Voices, Sleater-Kinney... you name it.

Meltzer was one of those up the wazoo, so to speak. His column, Me and the Night and the Music appeared fairly regularly during the first 2 to 3 years of its life. I read it, a lot, because t'was round that time my use of Blue Oyster Cult as a paradigm of how rock'n'roll had, and should, operate had been at its peak, and it got me into purchasing *Aesthetics of Rock*, and the rest is obvious.

The List

His first ish was 1.03, but I can't find it yet :(I think it's the one in AWOL called "Arnold, O.J., and the Brain from Planet Arous".

Issue 1.05: Twin spin!! [Another Superficial Piece About 176 Beatnik Books](#)

The column for (1.)'05: [Ten Random Discs](#)

Issue 1.06: The conclusion of the feature, [Another Superficial Piece About 176 Beatniks Books, Part 2](#)

Issue 1.07: [Real Time, Real Demons: Bouncing with Bud '64](#)

Issue 1.08: [Lies and Laughter](#) - A tale of his L A radio show.

Issue 1.09: [Classical Okay?](#) - RM and his shift from RnR to C. His big peice, which is now in Autumn Rhythm, is [Charles Bukowski: An Appreciation](#)

Issue 1.10: [Music for a Life Down the Drain](#) "Everything is death. Everything is dumb. Not enough is numb. Did he say *done?*"

Issue 1.11: [Classical Dreams](#) "They are not yet completely submerged."

Issue 1.12: [A Mexican Beer Christmas With The Meltzer Clan](#) ...And to all a good night.

--- and that was 1995.

Issue 2.01: [A Soundtrack for Reading My Novel](#) ... the novel being *The Night (Alone) (a novel)*.

Issue 2.02: [F**k My Childhood](#) - Home to such observations as "Childhood as magic? No. Childhood is belief in magic. A bigger diff than the diff between 4,000 tulips and a pack of Luckies. "

Issue 2.03: [Richard Strass \(Ho Hum\)](#)

Issue 2.04: [Two Guys Sitting Around Talking Opera and Stuff](#)

Issue 2.05: [Nick and Dick Talk About Dean](#) (That's Tosches, Meltzer and Martin)

Issue 2.06: [Anything They Could Do, Grossman Did Better](#)

Issue 2.07: [Numbers Never Lie!](#)

Issue 2.08: [Baseball, Unplugge](#)

Issue 3.05 [Six Previews of San Diego Concerts, Long Gone](#) (home to one of my favorite summations of the craft: "I'm in a FOUL mood today. Stay outa my way or I'll CRITIQUE YOUR ASS to hell. Just ME, just YOU...a decent song. You wanna see THEM, see THEM."

AWOL

The following at the ones I've yet to suss out of archive.org's labyrinth:

- LULU, LOLA, and LALO
- Arnold, O.J., and the Brain from Planet Arous, Parts One n' Two.
- If I Had a Pistol
- All the Tired Geezers in the Sun, Parts 1 and 2
- Ten John Cage Reviews
- City's on Flame with Rock and Roll: A San Diego Progress Report

[6 captures](#)

9 Oct 1999 - 30 Apr 2001



Ten Random Discs

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

When I first started listening to jazz I had this friend a couple years older, couple years' head start on me with the music, who used to insist you could enter a record store blindfolded, have 'em direct you to the jazz bins, and select five albums, ten, some number, and they'd maybe not all be great but f'r sure they'd at least be *good*. The premise being, *his* premise, I imagine in retrospect, that the basic unit of jazz is the whole damn thing, that in its stalwart specificity it's still idiomatically expansive enough to contextualize (and hominemize) anything done under its aegis (or on its periphery), that whatever it is that in fact jazz *does* it *always* does more or less.

Anyway, he never actually tried it, I've never tried it, I'm not sure how satisfied either of us would've been (in 1963) with the blind acquisition of some mambo junk by Cal Tjader or Brubeck's Disney album or Andre Previn's *West Side Story*, and I know how I'd feel today stuck with nonreturnable copies of Harry Connick or Marcus Roberts or Andreas Vollenweider. But I've gotta admit there remains something appealing about so specious a venture. Wouldn't wanna waste your time and mine with certain obvious clunkers, so how's about I just go buy and review the first album I see in the racks by, oh, let's see... Warne Marsh, Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, Bill Dixon, Bobby Bradford, Steve Lacy, Roscoe Mitchell, Derek Bailey, Albert Ayler...oh, I already said him? Well, alright, the first *two* by him just some chance releases by a random sampling of, y'know, jazz guys.

And so I don't get distracted from the task at hand so I don't in fact fake it, falsify the whole biz by making actual (pshaw!) *selections* I believe I'll send my young intern Woosni, give her the list and half an hour, 45... okay, let's see what she's got. Looks like she got us some *good'uns*.

Warne Marsh, *Posthumous* (Interplay) With Stan Getz finally dead, every principal white disciple of Lester Young is now dust, at least on tenor: Zoot Sims, Al Cohn is Allen Eager dead yet? Brew Moore certainly is. And Marsh, five years gone, is the least well-known if even *that* well-known, classed

usually as an acolyte of pianist Lennie Tristano rather than of Lester, but may well have been the greatest of the bunch. He's easily the greatest tenor player over 50 I ever saw perform. Lester gave the world much, including easy swing, cool cerebrality, the technology of direct access to previously remote (or submerged) emotional motherlodes, a sonic redefinition of the tenor in the pantheon of jazz saxophone on a par with Kant's retake on the Copernican Revolution, an unprecedented narrative intricacy (the first, Coleman Hawkins notwithstanding, to really "tell stories on his horn"), and more. But maybe the most elusive gift is his rethink of song form before the fact, his insistence that even a familiar ballad, *especially* a familiar ballad, be different, be totally fresh, totally new, the first time you play it. That includes the theme, y'know, the headnot merely come improv time. White Lestorians have tended to get lost in the pretty, and if part of the pretty is the tune qua tune... Lester's musical muse demanded more than that.

Marsh, meantime, was a whiz at coming up with revised melody lines, and I don't mean he played "on the chords." His lines at times sounded almost like Burroughsian cutups of the original themes, delightfully playful exercises on one hand, but most importantly they worked. They were as pretty, heck, as downright "lovely" as it gets. Sometimes he'd give 'em interpreter-friendly titles. For instance, in this '85 set, "Second Hand Romance" for "My Romance," "Things Called Love" for "What Is This Thing Called..." but even without such hints, or any semblance of identifiable source melody at all, there was always this sense of melodicality that ran at least as deep as Lester's, occasionally rang a tad more free than Ornette's, and even (at odd moments) gave Cecil Taylor a run for his money as melodist... a really far out, modern fucking guy. Not quite as great as his duo LP with Susan Chen from six or so months after this one. That LP reeked of an apparent (boy-girl?) chemistry far in excess of the standard vinyl encounter, but it was plenty good enough.

Cecil Taylor, *Looking (Berlin Version) Solo* (FMP) The greatest *musician* I've seen live, and here he is live in '89, a couple months after the recording of *In Florescence* for A&M.; Like a goddam force of nature, a veritable Season unto himself, he starts off slow, deliberate, takes four to five minutes to work up a full head of weather-systemic steam, then: PHOOM. Storms, floods, cascades- all that shitas no other pianist, any genre, has ever delivered. No better, no worse, than 99% of his recorded outings, which is to say fab, incredible, there is nothing else remotely like it on musical earth, though still nine or ten notches down, acoustically, from an actual live performance. At full tumult, he's gotta

be a tougher recording prospect than the 1970 Stooges. A slightly different configuration than he's dealt us before on disc: two half-hour segments followed by five real nice shorties of two-three minutes each.

Bill Dixon, *Son of Sisyphus* (Soul Note) Nine mega-vital, mega-quirky sound pastiches (totaling less than 40 minutes) by a former Taylor co-conspirator, on trumpet and some piano, accompanied by tuba, bass, and drums. Unlike Taylor's, Dixon's is not a room-filling music too many silences, too little bombast nor could you exactly call it meditative, not with the tuba farting all over the place, but it does find and fill myriad gaps in a still unfulfilled pre-postmodern jazz agenda without which, I dunno, the world will crumble or something. Minimalist? Okay. Music reinvented from the ground up? Sure. 'S also the last brass-concepted creative music to reflect concerns Miles Davis all but abandoned, to the detriment of it all, in '61 or '62.

Some astounding breath stuff breath-of- *life* stuff on "Schema VI-88."

Steve Lacy, *Futurities Part I* (Hat Art) Ten Robert Creeley poems set to music by another self-effacing Cecil alumnus. Arguably the ablest living soprano saxophonist, the man who essentially rediscovered that horn for jazz, and in the process introduced Coltrane to the instrument, Lacy here augments his more or less regular mid-eighties sextet with guitar, harp, and the underrated trombone of the "real Ray Anderson," George Lewis. The album contains pleasantly complicated writing and playing, with far more interesting, and interestingly executed, ensemble textures than Gunther Schuller pulled off with Charles Mingus's *Epitaph* for instance. Even the normally nettlesome voice of Irene Aebi, a sterner, less "existentially correct" Nico (when she wants to be and here she frequently is), is bearable.

Roscoe Mitchell, *Songs in the Wind* (Victo) It isn't humor, it isn't "weirdness" it's just Mr. Mitchell at work-equals-play. In the hands of anyone but Roscoe, the pedal-driven wind wand couldn't help but seem like some cornball Wyndham Hill bullshit or John Zorn novelty shtick. However, this here's a man with an ear for oddsound as sound, as auditory *function*, not merely as expedient tripwire for the grand (or not so grand) musical pratfall. Which is not to say it

isn't *also* that, the latter, nor that it ain't really "funny." Compared to the dotted-line silliness of Chicago colleague Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy, these tracks to me are more no-holds-barred hilarious, while much less bathetic. Compared, likewise, to recent waxings by the forcibly experimental but these days rarely funny Anthony Braxton, a sound-for-sound-saker if ever there was one, this 1990 whatsis gets the nod there too. In the biophysics of left-field mammal noise, Roscoe takes the cake.

Derek Bailey & Barre Phillips, *Figuring* (Incus) The writing equivalent of British guitarist Derek Bailey's basic line would be something like

this likesome
thingsome THINGthingthing ormaybenoteven tho
THUH
the
yeahy'knowyuhYUH YUH YUH thisisn'tum

Which is to say his single-note placement is all over the map. Barre Phillips, meantime, is one of the great masters of volume-modulated *squeaky* arco bass. This is two-man free improvisation till you puke, which is to say it's some kind of wonderful.

By turns jarring, soothing, oothingsomewhere between cacophony and...and what?at some stages it sounds sort of like folk music, or at least like folks warming up to play folk music. At other times it's like a disembodied sci-fi soundtrack, or chamber music on acid, or two kids throwing Tinker Toys around the garage. But the music never follows any variety of dotted, y'know, or even not so dotted, line. Goes *great* with a tea kettle whistling in another room.

Albert Ayler, *The First Recording Vol. 2* (DIW) Dig *this* one: four thoroughly fantastic '62 performances, previously available (or maybe not) only in Japan, by the man who took saxophone madness (e.g. expression) as far as it has so far been taken. The fact that he died in '70 prob'ly says something about the level of courage in jazz-at-large ever since. Is Ayler *the* most sorely missed of all the '60s trailblazepersons who failed to survive that still, if anything, *underrated* decade?

Well, yeah him and maybe Eric Dolphy. Coltrane's legacy authentic astral reveler side by side with willful colleague of Alice McLeod is just too jumbled.

Anyway, Albert's riffs here seem a lot more Ornette-like, if that's the operative historical plug-in Sonny Rollins-like?? than they would later sound. He takes a pair of pop warhorses "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise," "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" and some jazz neo-standards "Moanin'," "Good Bait" and just fucking *eviscerates* them.

Of more than mild archaeological interest: the same Swedish bassist and drummer (Torbjörn Hultcrantz, Sune Spangberg) that Bud Powell used on the club date of six months prior that would posthumously appear on his five-LP set for SteepleChase, *At the Golden Circle* .

Albert Ayler, *In Memory of Albert Ayler* (Jazz Door) Sixty-five minutes at Slug's, New York 1966: the sheer ferocity of Albert at his peak with a working unit including brother Donald. Recorded, it would seem, with a concealed, or perhaps not so concealed tape machine on somebody's lap, complete with bar conversations. Land shark with a machine gun meets cosmic hoedown meets Irish wedding/funeral meets a herd of wildebeests meets the tricentennial of the French Revolution. The last time, or close to it, any such gamut was run for real with so much impugnty.

Plus: drumming by Ronald Shannon Jackson from before he'd figured out how to "do it;" he wasn't up to Sonny Murray yet but was *trying* . Notes by multi-reedist Peter Brtzmann, Europe's loudest living overblower.

Ornette Coleman & Prime Time, *Jazzbñne Berlin '88* (Repertoire) Brion Gysin used to tell this story about Ornette's early-nineteen seventies trek up the mountains of Morocco to play with the Joujouka, these musicians who've been wailing all sorts of magical etc. for the last billion centuries. Gysin was there for the umpteenth time. It was Ornette's first, and I believe last. The story, the punchline, was there's this sequence of notes that's supposed to induce in the listener a given *olfactory* experience anybody who hears it will actually smell thus and such but Ornette, to Gysin's satisfaction, did not appear to have smelt it. Meaning: he may have been blowing alright, wailing even, but he (the goddam FATHER, certainly one of 'em, of modern *collective* improvisation) wasn't really *listening* .

It's always been my contention that Ornette has never exactly listened to Prime Time, the backup group which according to some interviews (but not others) was originally conceived as an electronic counterpart to the Joujouka, either. Lots of people disagree with me, claiming to hear this subtle interplay, all this rhythmic and harmonic foreground and background blah blahbut I just can't hear it. To me it's just a third- rate rock band playing one thing, shilling for youth sales underneath, and in lame support of Ornette's still quite Promethean something totally other. This release, from an East German radio broadcast, is essentially more of same. Prime Time drone on like a field of trained insects while Ornette, all but ignoring them, plays the fire that if they were flammable would instantly engulf and immolate them. He, considered in isolationas opposed to heard in samehas rarely sounded better, working up to a pretty good froth and fury on the last couple cuts. 'S a good thing we've at least got some documents of him in such tiptop form, and, who knows, he finally might be earning a middle-class living.

Bobby Bradford with the Frank Sullivan Trio, *One Night Stand* (Soul Note)A title fraught with more than its share of irony. On one hand you'd expect maybe one of those funk-era type LP's by Lou Donaldson or Baby Face Willette with titles like "Sow Belly Blues" and "Good 'n' Greasy" which this really ain't in the same planet system as. On the other, aside from being a *master* trumpeter and cornetist in the shadow of whom Wynton Marsalis (et al.) can just piss in a hat and forget it, former Ornette accomplice Bradford is this educator, see, based in the L.A./Pasadena area, teaching music is his frigging livelihoodwhich doesn't afford him much op to leave town *for* one night stands. When he does, thoughwell, this one (with a pickup trio in Florida, 1986) is a *beaut* of a showcase of basic, honest, meatlife-affirming, no-frills, jus'-do-it.

Preferable to *Comin' On* , Bradford's live CD from '88 with John Carter, if only because there's no synthesizer this time to even momentarily disrupt the sonic urgency. (Fuck meI'm a freaking purist.)

Good'uns...yep . On the evidence of which jazz must look incredibly healthy. Hot stuff is being *released* , alright, but if you check the bios of these people, everybody's over 50 or dead: not too many jazz newcomers, or even guys under 40, say, are as visionary, or adventurous, or experimental, or even just flat-out as *good* or half as good. Or if they're good (the Marsalises and the Courtney Pines and the Harper Brothers and their pop-star kind are not in fact "bad"- they're just pop stars), they themselves would be hard put to acknowledge any

past or present umbilical connectedness to the nurture tube of the Whole Previous (And Still Ongoing) Goddam Thing.

Fire is not something they wanna breathe and fire doesn't sell and the biophysics of sound is something for biophysicists and the biophysical workings of the human (under 30) nervous system have been undermined and enfeebled by MTV and it's much, much too easy to play for an audience of stupid fucks who don't know or care two shits in hell for anything that happened before they were 15 who don't even know and certainly wouldn't if told care that the competent-but-so-what pap they're being served is naught but a cheap retread of that which was SUPERSEDED BY the jackjoes in this review and *their* kind-ten years before they the stupid fucks were fucking born.

Bruce Springsteen and Wynton Marsalis are both on Columbia Records: think about it. Each knows not the diff between the '50s and '60s not to save his life- but still knows *far* more of history than he chooses, wishes, judges safe to "share" with his respective heap o' partisans. Give 'em a xeroxa xerox of a xerox of a xerox and tell them it's originalaboriginal who's to clue 'em otherwise? If somehow they get wise to the number, in five years less you've got a whole new tubload of dopes back at zero. Jazz, a 70-year-plus open-book slab of ongoingness, now shares with rock an aversion to ongoing anything but strategic deception. Diversion. Sooner or later it ain't just the audience that's diverted... distracted. False becomes the norm if it isn't already. History equals instant revisionism. And once we lose sight of the true germplasm of etcetera, we will sooner or sooner LOSE IT ALL...true. Noneno more! of this "in the tradition" bullcrapeat shit, those who once knew better: Archie Shepp, Arthur Blythe, David Murray: you know who you are.

I'm a crabby old crank.



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5 May 2001



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A Soundtrack for Reading My Novel

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

Charles Mingus, *Oh Yeah*, Atlantic 7 90667-2

Dexter Gordon, *Our Man in Paris*, Blue Note CDP 7 46394-2

Neil Young, *Harvest*, Reprise 2277-2

John Coltrane, *Coltrane's Sound*, Atlantic 1419-2

James Moody, *Moving Forward*, RCA/Novus 3026-2-N

Grateful Dead, *Terrapin Station*, Arista ARCD 8065

Doors, *Strange Days*, Elektra 9 74014-2

Allen Ginsberg, *Holy Soul Jelly Roll--Poems and Songs (1949-1993)*, Rhino/Word Beat R2 71693

Bob Dylan, *Blonde on Blonde*, Columbia CGK 841

Duke Ellington, *The Far East Suite*, RCA/Bluebird 07863 66551-2

Study in Frustration: The Fletcher Henderson Story, Columbia/Legacy 57596

Eric Dolphy, *Last Date*, Fontana 822 226-2

Art Pepper, *Intensity*, Contemporary OJC-387

Anthony Braxton, *For Alto*, Delmark DD-420/421

Something Else by the Kinks, Reprise 6279-2ŽIP5Ž

My first novel is out. Well, not exactly the first; there were two before. *Soft Dull*, from '67/'68, written entirely on pot, I threw down an incinerator somewhere in the '70s. *Never Enough Leg*, which I finished in the fall of '72, 200 pages of "intentional bad writing," is still in a folder in a drawer. *The Night (Alone)*, six years in the making, is 81 times better than anything by Raymond Carver—it's a good'un. Little, Brown & Company, publisher of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, is publishing. Best shit I've ever done—great title, eh? Anybody wanna interview me? No? Well, OK. For not the first time, and probably not the last, I will just hafta beat my own drum.

Music in the book? There's music in the book. References to, and music *per se*. My lines drip with it. Sing with it. No clinkers, no clunkers: not a page-line-syllable. Lemme quote you a sentence:

If you wanna kill me, and I know you do,
stick my head in a cube of concrete four-
foot square with two tiny airholes, just
enough to breathe, and dump me out a
chartered 707 seven miles above Lake
Huron: sploosh!

Nice, huh? And that's the *first* sentence. Music, music, music!

There are no drummers in the book, however, at least no "real" (nonfictional) ones. Bassplayers, tho, I've got Charles Mingus in the second chapter, "Woeful Blind Sap." No, he's not the sap. That's some other guy, a fake (fictional) piano player. Mingus shows up mid-chapter on a list of my all-time jazzbosnumber 16, tied with Benny Carter and Jelly Roll Morton. By "mine" I mean the author's, natch, the guy writing then, close but not identical to the guy writing now. *It ain't* the same, either, as that of the novel's or at least the chapter's-narrator/protagonist, all three of whom just happen to intersect (it's hardly compulsory!) in this individual case.

There's lots of different Minguses too, of course, but the one I wehad in mind, and I (author Richard Bruce Meltzer, fall '95) have in mind now, is the one responsible for "Hog Callin' Blues"—its auteur—with that great blow-your-brains-out solo by Roland Kirk on tenor. There's a lotta hog calling in the pages that follow, and duck calling, and name calling. I call people assholes and assflames

and baldies and dickheads and bags-o-shit and fuckheads and fuggers and pigfuckers and shitfuckers and fuckaloonies. Cusswords, there are lots of cusswords; if you enjoy cusswords, you could not go wrong with *The Night (Alone)*.

One of the strongest of tenor players, excluding the overblowers, as close as you're gonna get to the center of gravity of TENOR AS SHEER POWER, as opposed to hipshake or meat-spew, let's say, or hatchet fight, was Dexter Gordon, who makes an appearance on a T-shirt in the chapter "Cast of." His pic is on the shirt of this woman my character meets at a bar. "In a trio of gals she stood out, or maybe not so much *out*, to the eye, but the heatwool I felt this surge of nu-sex like a car battery feeding my accessories and leaking acid simultaneously." First person, the whole thing is first persona "my mess and welcome to it" novel. The mess here is he goes home, beats off a couple times thinking of her, waits a day for the sap to restore itself, gets primed to call her for some actual flesh 'n' falldown, his hunger-blood pumping and pumping till he can't take it, calls her, wrong number. The old formula-love equals griefbut then later in the chapter, longest in the book, writing comes in, and writing equals BIGGER GRIEF. (The guy is a "writer.") Ain't life funny?

Continuing the motif in "The Mode" (p. 118), I namedrop a tune for good measure:

"A Man Needs a Maid," that old Neil Young thing, I used to think a man needs a waitress--anyway it's what I told Ms. Della Veronico. I told her lots of things. Told her her job, my job--in many ways similar. She wore a uniform and I didn't, or if I did it was one changed five-six times a week, but anyway check it: WAITER....WRITER. WAITER minus I equals WATER--that's cool. WRITER minus I equals WRTER--inotherwords bullshit. (There ain't no writing without the I.) But the single thing common to both waiting and writing: y'always give more than you get.

How true, how true--if I say so myself. Followed by a pitch for you should give writers tips--if y'like 'em--this applies to newssheets as well as books. Dig it!

Speaking of tunes: "Night Has a Thousand Eyes." In "Five Versions," four recordings of this second-unit standard are discussed, compared, what have you, and one gratuitously mentioned. Among the former are John Coltrane's, the pulse of which "gets clogged occasionally, and he misses all these fat chances to really just *take it out*, but it's still really only just a notchor lessshort of *major greatness*," and James Moody's, which "soars out the gate like Booker

Ervin or somebody, which is sort of akin to him purposely doing a young, more ferocious paraphrase of himself, but he can't keep it up, it's 10 minutes long."

Speaking of gratuitous: Grateful Dead reference in "Home Rule for Scotland." Even my *thinking* them is gratuitous, as the album I think when I think Dead-thoughts at all is *Terrapin Station*. If you asked 1,000 Deadheads to name their favorite Dead LP, or their top nine or eleven, not three would list *Terrapin Station*. Only the title cut is worth mentioning. It's a hot one, tho (about...??it's anybody's guess a male loser's p.o.v. on "pussy"?). Great CD transfer, leaving the original overdone "rock" ("pop") productionless a deconstruction of the Dead than the ultimate sendupINTACT.



Not so gratuitous: "When the Music's Over." In the sixth chapter from the end, "Great Moments in Alone," my narrator is at this Up With People event, he's trying to pick up an Up With People chickhaand when that fails he settles for an oyster. No, not sexuallyhe snatches one at the oyster bar, goes home, puts on a Doors record, discovers he can't open it, none of his knives're sturdy enough, finally a scissors...shit...what a skimpy oyster. Parting line: "And when `When the Music's Over" is over I turn out the light."



Also in that scene is a cameo by Allen Ginsberg. The "chick," dressed as a beatnik in tribute to the '50s, is asked: "What do you think of Allen Ginsberg?" "Who's Allen Ginsberg?" "Can I get you a drink?" "We don't drink." Which is where Ihenot Allencops the oyster, but anyway, GinsbergGinsberg as *music*which Kerouac convinced him his poetry ought to be "bop prosody"has frequently had his rhythmic down side. His images are jake, no problem there, the connections, the linkages, fine, but I've always had trouble with his EARhis transcriptions of what he's hearing, how he sounds to himselfspecifically with his boast of "Lester Leaps In" as a sonic source of "Howl." Well, there's a reading out now of "Howl" from March '56, three years older than any previously available version, which I'll admit doesn't sound awful, especially in its earlier stages, where Allen's tentativeness is if anything a definite advantage. As long as he's still thinking/feeling/probing his way through it, before he settles into a

convenient (not particularly nuanced) "forward surge," the vectors are more multi-directional, with quirky accelerations (more of intensity than tempo) which at times help create the impression of "jazz time." All in all, a little slow maybe more a ballad with a head cold than "Lester Leaps In" but it'll do.

Far more interesting is his reading of "The Green Automobile" at the Cassady household, San Jose '54 slow and and scared and whispery like he doesn't want Neal to hear it in the other room sleeping, or worried that Carolyn might walk in and pick up the gay vibenekkid naked! This is v. much the sort of nakedness which runs hogwild throughout *The Night (Alone)* the bucknaked liveness of dangerous whoopee but hey, I don't whisper, and I didn't wait 40 years to release it: naked now! (The unidentified background music, by the way, seems to be the pianoless Gerry Mulligan/Chet Baker Quartet: "Love Me or Leave Me" check the discographies or possibly a Jimmy Giuffre combo.) The young Allen's reading voice is something like Kerouac's on record makes you wonder whether the influence was one-way or two.

Influences, okay I will readily cop to Dylan's lyrics (and "attitude") having had an impact on my writing in, well, no later than '66, '67. In his heyday, he influenced all sorts of people. The Stones. Jimi Hendrix. My old pal Patti Smith, who said she would do me a blurb for the back cover but didn't (I had to settle for Tom Robbins). My old pal Dave Alvin. Billy Joel and Melanie. So why not me? A line I remember meaning a GREAT DEAL to me: "I'm just sitting here beating on my trumpet" ("Absolutely Sweet Marie"). No, I haven't plagiarized or "appropriated" it (I'm no Kathy Acker); I've got my own metaphors and euphemisms for the male pecker: dingo, dinger, dong, prong, lovestub, dipstick, tubesteak, tuber, weeny, peeny, carrot, mushroom, nozzle, two-wood, "it" all of which appear in the book. But not: banana, broom handle, weasel, lizard you gotta draw a line somewhere. Dylan himself appears as the "brown corduroy `Bob Dylan hat'" in the chapter "The Pants in My Closet, the Socks in My Drawer."



Dylan, Bob, "Memphis Blues Again" from *Blonde On Blonde*
(45 second excerpt)



[Stereo MPEG \(1.08M\)](#)



[Mono MPEG \(541k\)](#)



Speaking of trumpets, *The Far East Suite*, one of Duke Ellington's last handful of truly great elpees, contains 4/5 of an answer to a question in the last paragraph of "State Terrorism," the "anti-marriage" chapt. in which I make clear how wrong it is to register your love with the state *ooh* is it wrongunless, for inst, a p.l.o. (primary love object) should "force me to the wall, especially at a time when the thought of dissolution leaves me clinging to a wad of toilet paper in a floodin The Flood no quick sink down any drain (or o'er the Edge), just rage swept forever AWAY...if...then...then I *might* let them register us. I grow gray, I grow wearied" which helps 'splain it" but even in dog surrender I would demand the dignity of a personal wedlock address, a conjugal vow in and of my own penmanship." A vow for all seasons followshey, it's a *pisser*-followed by the question-answer part, including: "Name five trumpeters who have recorded with Duke Ellington." Reading off the disc supplies you with *Cootie Williams*, *Cat Anderson*, *Mercer Ellington*, and *Herbie Jones*after that you're on your own.

One of the Duke's earliest big-band role models was Fletcher Henderson. A charter occupant of the slot just above Mingus's in "Woeful Blind Sap," one shared with Count Basie, Coleman Hawkins, and Billie Holiday, Henderson in his various band guises produced some of the most consistently kinetic music of the centurystuff which not only MOVED but possessed *the* unit kernel (Zeno be damned) of movement TO THE OTHER SIDE...every step *more than half*...efficient but unforced...the unit micro-utterance alive with BLAT-YAT-BWAHHH.

Henderson: at the top of his game for years, years, yet UNSUNG (had to carry Benny Goodman's jockarranged for him, ghosted his "invention" of Swingto make it through the '30s)yrs., yrs., well me too: unsung. Relatively.

And now I feel like singing. Or drumming. So lemme take a soloI'll be brief limited to jus' the novel at handhere I go...

Compared to all the many other life-lived-for-keeps, boys-will-be-boys opuses of the last 95 years (none of which, by the by, served as models in the writing of this one) (but after the fact, what the hey), this one is certainly *up there*...

As a hetero stations-of-penis novel, it makes *Portnoy's Complaint* look like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. About eighty times as visceral, as flat-out entertaining. On an artso level, imagine *Portnoy* written not by Philip Roth but by Samuel Beckett (assisted by Mark Twain): *funnier* than Roth, and at the same time more structurally and psychologically airtight, more take-no-prisoners thoroughgoing in the self-examination. Y'might add: with no filtering, no censoring the content of the narrator's experience, this masterpiece of "black humor" is a peek into the Personal so atom-perfect it's Universal, a dizzying ride over vast emotional terrain, from the ecstasy which guarantees which *is*-immortality to the final chill of the last fire gone out on earth.

Similarly, *Lolita*, while at least as deep a delve into it's a less one-track *Ginger Man* and its protagonist's mindset/heartset. *Lolita* would seem an obvious reference for the chapter "Old Tricks" ("Sweet sixteen! Oh she was really a honey"), but the former deals with a single obsession, where my book as a whole treats such biz as but one obsession among many. Ditto, *Ginger Man* and the chapter "Days of Beer and Daisies" the subject here is dwinking I've got many more routes to oblivion (wrestling, anyone? entomology?).



While certain wags have compared me to Charles Bukowski we both have eyes for the tangible heart of things, a contempt for the ruse writ large, a lack of squeamishness about biological material on all fronts my book trounces any of his better fictional efforts (*Women*, *Ham on Rye*, *Post Office*). As a human document, it's without all the tough-guy posturing, the trademark bluster for bluster sake; in terms of craft, if you wanna be that bourgeois, it's as if Faulkner or Conrad had written them. Now that the old pimp face is dead, you can pretend (if you want) that I'm his successor (I'm the same age he was when his first novel was published).

Speaking of Faulkner: multiple narrative voices. Where in *The Sound and the Fury* he's got four of 'em, and in *As I Lay Dying* something like 14 or 15, I use a different voice with a wholly different, *intriguingly* different narrative intent a different premise for story telling--virtually every chapter. Also like Faulkner: writer-side mischiefstrew shit ALL OVER so you can in good time unstrew it--but you can more often understand what I'm saying.

A boatload of comparisons could be made of my work to Kerouac's we share something of the ramble, the language-lust, the tightrope walk between exaltation and despair but okay, let's see...one of his books and mine. While ostensibly a tale of love/lorn etcetera, *The Subterraneans* ends with the line: "And I go home having lost her love...And write this book" what an easy ride! What if he also had to contend explicitly as only seems fair--with the book's own fragile contingency? Hey the Book is no more a fait accompli than Love (and writing itself, as both life and his biographers would later shout in italics, can be one massive heart-threat). But anyway, I and my book are for damn sure an extension of the true (but forgotten) Beat legacy: the linkage of kicks with CELLULAR CONCERN. (Certainly more than Tom Waits and his toad-throated shtick.)

If I can be seen as true heir to the Beats, why not to Celine as well? My units of gasp (and relief) are as oxygen-perfect as those in *Journey to the End of the Night*, my stutters and meanderings as fraught with mammal surprise, as shot-in-the-dark on, as those in *Death on the Installment Plan*. In the final analysis no mean feat I'm simultaneously twice as bleak as Louis-F. and umpteen times as cheerful.

Ulysses ? *Moby Dick* ? Well, sure, why not? *The Night (Alone)* is in their league, geez, you bet: as hell-and-gone to the goddam Adventure, as up to its nose in high-risk language booty the search for a means of writing your way out of any and all proverbial (real!) paper bags but more compact than either. (If Joyce here is a .380 hitter and Melville .330, I'd put myself at a solid .358).

And if you don't care for prose, how 'bout poetry? I got another one out, buncha poems, *Tropic of Nipples*. On Feral House. In their hype for the book, and they oughta know they've just reprinted *Tortures & Torments of the Christian Martyrs* they fearlessly claim: "Meltzer's poetry is so good that you hardly realize you're reading verse" a compliment (?) I can live with.

Dunno exactly what they're driving at, but could be they have got in mind "Same League (for Eric Dolphy)," which runs as one continuous un-line-broken stanza: "If I ever run into Kareem Abdul-Jabbar at Rhino Records where we both sometimes shop I'm gonna tell him ('cause it's true) that the moment he scored his 31,421st point I was listening for the first and possibly last time to "Mr. Dolphy" by James Newton which is not in the same league with the lamest thing, whatever that might be, Eric himself ever did. (And see what he says.)"

Or possibly "Art Pepper Is Not a Happy Man" the dead never are or are they? -
which ends: "my heart is a beached/ whale/ on Zuma Mazuma Beach/ with
spears running/ through it/ but my dick still works some-/ times."

Or maybe even "Props," the one that begins
Jazz doesn't have to swing
and rock doesn't have to rock
and religion has next to nothing to do
with God

who what which
is at most just one of the goddam
props
through which we have
so-called religious experiences

and is food for thought tho I don't actually list any examples, altho right off the
bat I can think of few greater albs than Anthony Braxton's *For Alto* , just him
and his alto rushing headlong up alleys, blind or otherwise, in search of walls to
bang into pretty amazing stuff for a hotter '60s rock album than *Something Else*
by the Kinks , which doesn't rock *nohow* , and doesn't hafta, who say it does? I
say it *don't* hafta I already said that.

This has been a long fucking piece. If you can read it, you can read a book.
Two books. *The Night (Alone)* and *Tropic of Nipples*.



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30 Aug 1999 - 4 Sep 2001



About this capture



Richard Strauss (Ho Hum)

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier*, with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig, Teresa Stich-Randall, Otto Edelmann, Eberhard Wächter, Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, EMI CDS 7 49354 2

Strauss, *An Alpine Symphony*, Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta, Sony SK 45800

Strauss, *Ophelia Lieder*, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Glenn Gould, piano, Sony SM2K 52657

Strauss, *Metamorphosen*, Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, Deutsche Grammophon 410 892-2

Kirsten Flagstad in Concert 1948-1953 (including the world premier of Strauss's *Four Last Songs*), Eklipe EKR CD 15

I jus' visited the parents and came home with a



mint-condition styptic pencil my not-dead-yet father is too Parkinsoned out to use, seeing as how he's too Parkinsoned out to shave, reminding me of the electric razor I got from my dead grandfather after his second stroke, in turn reminding me of (possibly) the dumbest thing I ever did, at least the dumbest I'm willing to talk about: shave my chest after the 1962 Far Rockaway High senior boatride.

I'd been using the thing for maybe three years, a Remington?not a Norelcoa couple times a week max. Which partly explains how come I was so hot to use it on a part of me other than my faceI *liked* using it, it made me feel like a practice grownup, like a rock-out daddy of a practice grownup, like in spite of my ugly flattop and my ugly specs (and the fact I was a shorty) I might actually get some wet stuff on my weasel before I was 40, by which time (I figured) I'd have been teaching high school math somewhere in Brooklyn for 18-19 years. Which even itself was kind of a dumb thing to imagineI mean here I am 49 and I still haven't...that's a *joke!*but anyway it was hogwash like that which conspired with dumb teenage science to make me actually believe a razor could and would *give me chest hair*.



Maybe it was a Braun. I don't know.

What gave me that idea was this jerk named Ira Reitman or Reiter, an average-looking red-haired senior who used to look like a fugging *fool* the way he parted it funny, was up on the same deck as me with a better-than-average-looking senior female on his arm. It's true he no longer parted it funny, probably hadn't for two-three years for all I was noticing, but the thing I noticed there on the boat was this red hairy *chest* sticking out of his unzipped red, yellow & blue flag jacket (no shirt).

Flag jackets were big that spring in Rockaway, nautical patterns in either blue/yellow/red or black/yellow/red, possibly also white substituted for yellow, and Ira was the first guy I saw make actual *nautical use* of one, i.e., wind blowing and the Hudson already smelling like things people nowadays sail on, a dame on his arm at the rail with fun-wracked boat creeps gawking jealous. I was sick-jealous of the bastard, so when I got home I took the leap and shaved it.

My chest, on the theory that hair grows faster after shaving. Before you shaved it just grew. Afterwards, tho, it would get serious about meeting the demand, or was it the supply? as opposed to just playing harder to get this was the basic theory. 'Nother theory was the buzzing of the razor would itself *stimulate growth*. So I picked this spot just above the solar plexus where the ribs join up in the middle and mowed down the only hairs I had between crotch and face.

Where to this day they have not grown back, nor been replaced: nothin'. Only section of an otherwise *passable male chest* devoid of fur. Can't recall how long it took me to realize I'd blown it, but I didn't take my shirt off much that summer or the next. Worked as a garbage picker for the Parks Department down on the filthy beach, sweating in the sun poking at watermelon rinds and yesterday's puke and once we had to load a dead bulldog on a truck it had floated in bloated with sand and seawater and girls in two-pieces stood around saying *yuk* and hairy lifeguards laughed and called us shitpickers and I always kept my shirt buttoned sun is the enemy (burns, cancer) anyway and after work I'd go to the library looking for hypnotism books, but they were always checked out, other desperate dumbos must've had the same idea: once they're hypnotized you can *sex them all you want*.

Okay, heh heh too dumb to live enough and now the dumbest *music* thing I've ever done, or the dumbest *classical* thing, whatever: letting Glenn Gould talk me into buying a whole buncha shit by Richard Strauss. Although who am I kidding? You know, I know, everybody knows I get reimbursed for this bizany less, who would do it, right? But still, shoot, I am gravely disappointed pissed with the purchases with only myself to blame.

Shoulda known, shoulda known I'd never been crazy about Strauss to begin with. "Facile""glib""too clever/cute for his own good" in the words of various conventional wags...can't say I seriously disagree with 'em. I've got this working analogy: Strauss is to Wagner as Stan Getz is to Lester Young.

Acolyte...innovator. Applier, more or less, of an eminently useful Way of Doing Things...creator of the Way. You've heard Stan, you know what I'm

talking about: flow chart (and plumbing) taken for granted, gush or gulp as add-on rather than (more often than) emotional outcome, neat dramatic package (and packaging) in lieu of existential drama, harmonic derring-do as surface grandiloquence, the equation of more *as* more (meaning, well, less) but when it works, it *works*.

(Among the other prominent Wagnerians, Bruckner would likewise be to Wagner as Paul Quinichette is to Lester. The first bozo to elevate Wagner to the level of godhead, Bruckner so feared desecrating anything by changing it he just lifted it Wagner without vocals, Wagner as symphony; Quinichette was a Lester copycat so thorough he copied the *late* Lester he came in later while most apers aped just the early. Mahler, meanwhile, would be some "thinking" version of Lester, say Warne Marsh, and Cesar Franck is, I dunno, the dregs of Lester: Phil Urso, Brew Moore.)

Anyway, Getz/Lester seems to hold up for the tone poems, from *Macbeth* to *Till Eulenspiegel* to *Ein Heldenleben*, even the early one-act operas (*Salome*, *Elektra*), and for an occasional listen I can stand any of it. So then I read "Strauss and the Electronic Future," a '64 essay in which Glenn decries the critical bracketing of Strauss's output after *Elektra* (1908) as a lesser and above all tamer breed of beast, a shame and a pity as the sumbitch is (sez Glenn) *the* great composer of the 20th (not the late 19th!) century, one continuous stream of hot shit, etc., etc., etc., and like a rube I fall for it. Like a sack of potatoes.

After the more than acceptable discordancies and yowlings of *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* (1910) begins like "Twilight Time" by the Platters, and even under full sail feels more like an operetta (or a tag-team song cycle) than an opera, it just doesn't have the binding energy, the centripetal, even centrifugal force, that opera (even in transparency, like *Pelleas & Melisande*) is, or should be, lousy with: what tepid shit. Forty-nine tons of confectioner's sugar, more treble-heavy than Scritti Politti. If this was Beatles, it would be "Long and Winding Road."

And this cross-gender bizness with the title role doesn't work for me: it's okay to have female voices dominate (although after a while the first act sounds like a tweety-bird contest), and if you had something sexual between these people *as* women, fine, but the charade *as drama* doesn't play. If even Rossini didn't pull such crap, it has to be prima facie TOO CUTE, y'dig?

Do I even gotta mention that the "references" to Mozart are far less telling, have much less weight, than those to Johann Strauss, vater und sohn? (In *La*

Valse, Ravel dispenses with "Viennese decadence" with far more efficiency, economy it's only like 12 minutes long and panache.)

This is the sort of stuff that *Wozzeck* and its ilk arrived (just in time) to kill.

It's all Glenn Gould's fault. Don't listen to him.



It was an enormous hit, of course things that bourgeois often are and when the Allies came to his door after the War this is two wars later (he was tried as a collaborator, but weaseled out), he introduced himself as "Richard Strauss, composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*" what a joik.

An Alpine Symphony, his 1915 paean to snowy blowy Aryan purity, takes a couple minutes to build up a *Zarathustra* head of steam, but only a junior version of it (more a *Star Trek* spinoff than *2001*): behold a, uh, mountain (ho, y'know, hum). After that, just as with the big Z itself, it's pretty much downhill (downhill as it in fact proceeds uphill), a snooze interrupted only by an occasional brassy burble or fanfare a "call to adventure" until finally an oboe announces the entry of the wind machines, which themselves fade into the freezy breezy wurst, excuse me, mist.

The *Ophelia Lieder* (first half of *Sechs Lieder*, 1918), sung clearly by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf with Glenn on piano, are nice enough little songs, but how much can you tell from three little songs? They also seem a little too pretty for texts derived from *Hamlet* is *Hamlet* supposed to be *pretty*? (No libretto fuck the Glenn Gould Edition.) Glenn asserts that in these works Strauss employs "the neurotic qualities of nonfunctional dissonance," which are reconciled "within the tonality that he had expanded to accommodate them" ...sounds like a wimp-out to me.

(Also on the disc, f.y.i.: the largely unbearable *Enoch Arden* from 1897 with Claude Rains as reciter and some piano pieces from when Strauss was 16 that sound as insipid as any of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. Don't say I didn't warn you.)

Time, as they say, at this point marches. Leaps. An opportunist scumbag, Strauss endorses National Socialism, becomes head of Goebbels' Reichsmusikkammer in '33, helping cleanse German music of Jewish, modernist, and other "unhealthy" elements. His late friend Mahler, for one, can get fucked. Doesn't tell nobody, meantime, that he's still using the Jewish librettist Stefan Zweig (or that his daughter-in-law is Jewish); he's Big Shit, how can they not allow him? After his inevitable fall from grace, he spends the war years in limbo and relative dysphoria. (While Zweig, for the record, ends up suiciding in Brazil.) As '44 goes to '45, Germany gets blown to smitheroo, concert halls in Berlin, Dresden, Munich get leveled, and only then, FINALLY, at 81, does he get the message, part of one, sitting down to write *Metamorphosen*, his requiem (for 23 solo strings) to German culture.

Which in a way, if you can stand late-Romantic overkill half a century after the fact, really ain't half bad. In addition to sounding like late Mahler and Schoenberg's pre-atonal, late-Romantic *Verklärte Nacht* (it took the war to turn Strauss into a Jewboy like everybody else), it's something unique as well: music not of courage but of courage eroded, not of (and from) balls, so-called, but of (and from) balls stepped on by a pack of horses which you don't get too much of, not often, not at such a level of competence. (Even Tchaikovsky's 6th-the *Pathétique* isn't this excruciated and excruciating.)

But there are moments too where it's basically just potboiler soundtrack music, the crummy resolution to a manipulative love story (or something)...am I right or am I right?

The end, literally: *Four Last Songs* ('48). Again re Mahler, death consciousness at 84 is different from ditto at 50 or do I nitpick? It took him not exactly twice as many years to get there, more like 1-2/3 as many, but okay, I'll admit, death knowledge (he *was* 84) probably entitles a work, a composer, to more ad hominem oompah than death suspicion, even *good* suspicion (Mahler and his bum ticker at 45; syphilitic Schubert at 30).

In any event, a decent simulation (as all composed, as opposed to "performed," music must settle for being) of terminality, almost on a par with the last Louis Armstrong album, for instance. The closing of an old, old book that feels like that: a book. With old paper, the kind they don't make anymore, made to last (but still, better go to microfilm).



The fourth and last song in sequence, "Im Abendrot," contains a reprise of the theme from *Tod und Verkl., rung* (1889): NEVER say die to expedient recycling!

Hey I'll cop to it the only Strauss I can sit for this week is *Don Juan*, *Elektra*, and parts of *Salome* (not the Dance of Seven Veils).

God it's tough being an archaeologist.



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Two Guys Sitting Around Talking Opera and Stuff

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

Adam Parfrey and Poison Idea, *S.W.A.T.--Deep Inside a Cop's Mind*, guest appearances by Jim Goad, Anton LaVey, Boyd Rice, Nick Bougas, Amphetamine Reptile 029

Anton Bruckner, *Symphony No. 3*, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Eliahu Inbal, Teldec 4509-91445-2

Francis Poulenc, *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Catherine Dubosc, Rita Gorr, Josc Van Dam, Jean-Luc Viala, Lyon Opera Chorus & Orchestra, conducted by Kent Nagano, Virgin 7 59227-2

Giacinto Scelsi, *Okanagon*, Joalle LCandre, double bass, voice, Giancarlo Schiaffini, trombone, Hat Art 6124

Franz Schreker, *Der Schatzgrober*, Josef Protschka, Gabrielle Schnaut, Harald Stamm, Peter Haage, Hamburg State Philharmonic, conducted by Gerd Albrecht, Capriccio 60 010-2

Benjamin Britten, *War Requiem*, Galina Vishnevskaya, Peter Pears, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by the composer, London 414 383-2ÆIP5Ø



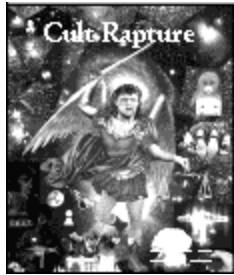
Mr. Meltzer's being modest...of course he's your favorite.

I'm not the only jerk who writes books. And I'm not the only one who writes good ones.

MAKE WAY for Adam Parfrey--your favorite columnist and mine! SET ASIDE a spot on your nightstand or shelf for *Cult Rapture*...it's a doozy. THREE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-ONE pages for the low-low price of \$14.95...why that's barely four cents a page.

I write books, I read books, and this is the best book I have ever read. Books are not something I lie about. (You want lies, go read John Updike.) True, I'm known mainly for my fabulous fiction, but for reading porpoises, give me a good hot helping of nonfiction anyday, and *Cult Rapture* is that in spades--*diamonds*--heart, liver & pancreas. The lowdown--the skinny--on San Diego's own Unarius cult!...the irrepressible Bo Gritz!...an Elvis fuckaloony and her sick cat!...Big-eye artist (or is he bullshit artist?) Walter Keane!...Linda (not the folksinger) Thompson!...Oklahoma bomb biz up the old wazoo!...cripples and amps who suck toes!...Every word true, and every word interesting. Pardon me now if I go out on a limb, but if there is no Pulitzer for this man, this work, I will eat my own Nobel.

A winner with heart, a man who remembers his forebears (something that cannot be said for Wm. Burroughs or Washington Irving), Parfrey has dedicated the tome to his dead cold pop, actor Woodrow Parfrey--star of *Planet of the Apes*.



...though whoever wrote this would come in a close second.

TRIPLE DYNAMITE--Adam is not only the author of *Cult Rapture*, not only its dedicator, but its publisher. Feral House, the greatest House since Random, is his baby. Titles include: *Cad: A Handbook for Heels...Rants & Incendiary Tracts...Apocalypse Culture* (called by J.G. Ballard "the terminal document of the 20th century")...*Nightmare of Ecstasy: The Life and Art of Edward D. Wood, Jr.*....*Tortures & Torments of the Christian Martyrs*...*The Satanic Witch* by Anton LaVey...*Psychic Dictatorship in the U.S.A.*

And not only books: Records. Tapes. CDs. Not the least of which, *S.W.A.T.*, the CD that takes you "deep inside a cop's mind"--a dangerous mission but someone hasta do it.

YES, A.P. is equal parts H.L. Mencken and P.T. Barnum, Carl Schwendeman (you don't know him) and Teddy "Red Shoes" Duggan. Over cocktails at the Chateau Chez Poodle in Coronado, me and him discussed various stuff.

Me: Okay, Adam, let's see how much you remember of your own book. Which chapter does Howard Keel appear in?

Adam: Howard Keel?!?!

M: Howard Keel. *The Howard Keel* is in your book.

A: Are you sure it's not John Keel?

M: *Howard* Keel--just guess.

A: Howard Keel, Howard Keel...

M: You give up?

A: Oh, I know--the Keane chapter.

M: That's right. Howard Keel was one of the supercelebrities that Walter Keane hobnobbed with.

The Oklahoma City Bombing, immortalized by Mr. Parfrey.



A: It had to be that. It could not have been the Oklahoma City bombing chapter.

M: How many other books would you say came out in 1995 in which Howard Keel appears?

A: I doubt he's even in Leonard Maltin's book. I'm proud to have him in mine. I'm a booster of lost celebrities, kind of like *Whatever Happened to...?*, remember that? Richard Lamparsky. I bought a painting from him once. It was of Shirley Temple with a swastika in the background. He wanted to get rid of it because plumbers had odd responses to it, he put it in a room he called Shirley's Temple. Since then I've sold it to Crispin Glover, I just Fedexed it to him today.

M: Did you make a profit?

A: Yeah. But Lamparsky was moving to Santa Barbara from Hollywood and he was finally a little worried about what people might think. Because this was Shirley, age 5, with a swagger stick up her cunny while wearing complete SS gear.

M: When do you think it was painted?

A: I think it was completed in the mid '70s by a guy named Bob Veze, who became a video, uh, he did Playboy Channel things, in other words like a director of soft-core porn. But other people thought it was Mel Ramos--it's unsigned--because it was not only a professional, an expert with the airbrush, but he was ashamed to sign his name to it. It hung in my home when I lived in Hollywood, but since I've moved it never found a place, and I needed some quick cash, and Crispin was nice enough to come through.

M: Getting back to Howard Keel, did your father ever work with him?

A: I doubt it, he was more of a musical comedy type guy. My father wasn't in many of those types of productions. Although he did do *Oh Captain!* on Broadway, with Tony Randall. He did do song and dance kind of stuff, I know because I've seen pictures of it. But when he sang in the house, we ran to the other side of, or outside. He was fond of singing "Bushel and a Peck."

M: My dentist used to sing that. Wasn't it also, in the early '50s, a song that was taught to familiarize schoolkids with measurements? Farm kind of volumetric things--which if you lived in a city were *quaint*, uh, concepts.

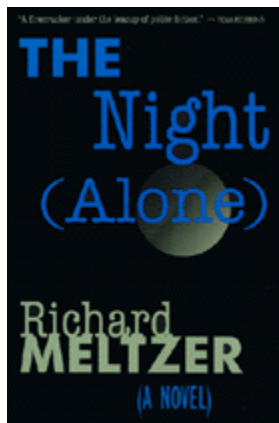
A: What was that from, *Guys and Dolls*? Which was odd, because it was sung by a gold digger in this Runyonesque thing, singing about bushels and pecks, I'm surprised it wasn't avoirdupois weights.

M: Did you yourself ever do musical comedy?

A: Closest I came to it was a record called *S.W.A.T.*

M: A fine record! *Quite* a fine record.

A: Yeah. That was musical comedy, it was like doing old chestnuts with new lyrics, elaborately produced and...



Richard Meltzer isn't the only one who writes good books.

M: How many takes did you do on that talky one, about how cops are the only real people?

A: That was a second take. The first was unnatural, it sounded like a rehearsed dialogue. The next take I put some comestible in my mouth, probably a potato chip or two, to make it sound like my mouth was otherwise occupied.

M: As cops' mouths often are.

A: Yeah. It was supposed to be in a coffee shop. We even had a waitress come in at the end of the skit.

M: A literal waitress?

A: No, an aspiring waitress, let's say. I was an aspiring cop.

M: How many takes was "The Pusher"?

A: One take. Well, see, *Goddamn*--the problem with that one was you had to give your all, and while giving your all you had to figure out fifteen different ways to say *Goddamn* and make it meaningful. Or satirical. Or ironic. Or nonrecognizable as being satiric *or* nonsatiric.

M: So anyway, this book, *Cult Rapture*, compared with, say, *Apocalypse Culture*--two wide sweeps across the contempo-et-cetera-- you wrote more of this than that, right?

A: Yeah, it's more my thing, although it was, uh, I planned to do it all myself, but it was very hard to let some gems go by. Like this Elvis lady, the story of her miraculous in vitro fertilization--utilizing Elvis's germplasm--and also this neo- Nazi's rhapsodic anti-Wilhem Reich essay, about the sexual wonderland of the Third Reich, for Aryans of course.

M: He's like the murderer, right, the guy who killed some hairdresser who was turning Jews into blondes? Has he been executed?

A: He's on death row, but he has to undergo a second, he'll be executed twice probably. He has to stand trial for another murder.

M: Does he know that his text is in the book?

A: Well, when I did an interview with him--you have to call collect from prison--I let him know I was gonna do it in a book. I *did* tell him, but...fortunately I don't think any sort of retribution would be possible.

M: And since he's childless, and that's one of his rants--that somehow Jews have made it impossible for him to find a wife--he's wifeless and thus childless, so his estate won't come gunning for you.

A: I think it's the end of the line, as far as his lineage goes. Thank God.

M: Do you feel for the guy, being wifeless? As a married man yourself.

A: Don't get me in trouble. I feel sorry that he felt he had to go to such a terrible extent to find a wife for himself, but I don't think he went about it the right way. I don't think killing people will necessarily get you squatch.

M: Whereas in your chapter "From Russia, with Love," there are wife services which he could've availed himself of.

A: He could have, you know. He worked for the BATF, he had a salary, and he could've gotten a nice, y'know, Russian broad for his trouble--they're not picky. It's not like going to the Home Club, but...

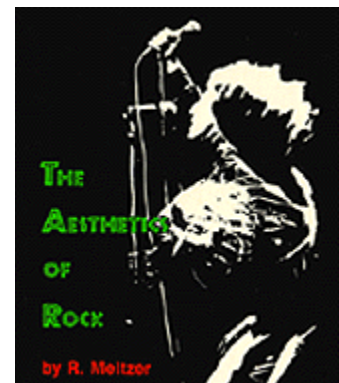
M: They're probably at least quasi-Aryan.

A: Especially if he gets a White Russian. Or Ukrainian.

M: The Ukrainians were big collaborators, weren't they?

A: Yeah, they were definitely collaborators.

In Fact, Mr. Meltzer has written quite a few good books!



M: I remember when I was a stamp collector, as a kid, the Ukraine issued some *very* pretty Hitler stamps.

A: You mean they touched up his mustache?

M: No, there were probably two or three different ways to print a stamp in those days, and these were like very detailed engravings. They went to a great extent to get the details out.

A: Wow, that's a new piece of knowledge.

M: They were large-format Hitler stamps.

A: The only time I see Hitler stamps anymore is at gun shows. They usually have them next to, they have like this business going on now, what do you call

it, a pirating operation, with fake Jew-skins, for lamps, and also fake Nazi medals.

M: You mean you just assume they are, at the prices they're charging they must be fake?

A: Well, it's more than assumption, these people will just tell you they're, like a Consumer Reports on the prowl, y'know? My dad had real Nazi memorabilia, for example he took a belt off the commandant of the POW camp he was in. He had this Nazi belt, and it fit me perfectly, but eventually I lost it.

M: Good leather?

A: It was a cloth belt, kind of like a Boy Scout belt.

M: How'd he manage to get it off the guy?

A: Well, when he was liberated, they had to give up their guns, and also their dignity. So the shoe was on the other foot, as it were.

M: And somebody probably got the shoes too.

A: They got as much as they could, I'm sure. My dad was only about 65 pounds at the time. They shot him full of glucose on the ship going back to the states, he developed diabetes, and now I live on with that legacy.

M: You can inherit acquired diabetes?

A: He must've had a predisposition for it. On the other hand, he was near death and the treatment was shooting him full of glucose--not a very wise thing. So he developed diabetes soon after.

M: You ever see *The Young Lions*?

A: No.

M: Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, Dean Martin. Brando plays the good Nazi, kind of an anarchist who spends his leave time getting laid back in Berlin, jaded wives of commanding officers. At the end of the movie they're liberating some camp and he can't wait to surrender, so he runs to these American soldiers with his hands up, and Montgomery Clift, who has taken a lot of shit for being a Jewboy in the Army--Dean Martin is his only friend--he sees Brando running toward him and says, "Kraut," and shoots him.

A: What's that supposed to instruct us? But you know that Brando played George Lincoln Rockwell in the TV movie of *Roots*. I found Rockwell's book *White Power* in a used book store, four dollars, it had the dust jacket on and everything else. Inside was a cover of *TV Times*, from the *L.A. Times*, with Marlon Brando and James Earl Jones. James Earl Jones playing Haley and Brando playing Rockwell--so he played a good Nazi and a neo-Nazi.

M: He's too old and fat to play Hitler.

A: Yeah. That always went to like Hopkins and Richard Basehart and little skinny character actors.

M: Basehart was okay.

A: He chewed up the scenery pretty good.

M: And then he did *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*.

A: My father did a *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*. He played a guy who could remote-control this big gorilla, this white gorilla doing all sorts of mayhem around the ship. Richard Basehart of course was there, David Hedison, I met Basehart and I destroyed a take. My stomach gurgled so loud the directors yelled, "Cut! Who's this kid?" But since my dad was a guest star, they couldn't slice me into pieces.

M: Did they say, "Feed this kid, give him a donut"?

A: I had probably had too many studio donuts already. It was 20th Century Fox, and the set was next to the *Lost in Space* set, where my brother fucked up the robot pretty badly. He was eight years old and excited to see the robot, so he started fooling around with it, and the arm fell off, it was pretty funny.

M: More of your family and you could've destroyed TV production in a big way.

A: I tell you, it was right around the time of *Cleopatra* and 20th Century Fox was taking a dive, so yeah, any more Parfrey kids and we would've sunk the studio.

M: You ever think of doing a Hollywood book?

A: I *did* a Hollywood book--Ed Wood.

M: I mean a multifaceted Hollywood, uh--all the *atoms* of your own Hollywood recollection.

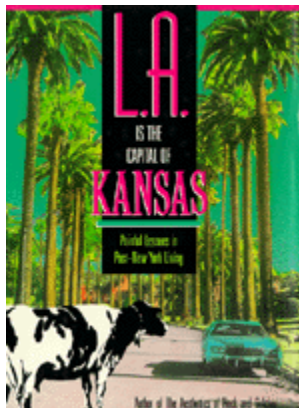
A: My recollection? It would be too slight. My recollections are all very vicious and very personal, very one-sided.

M: Well, you can't beat that.

A: I know--to an extent. But it might make a good chapbook or something, but not a big book of just all these atoms, as you say.

M: Okay. So the main question left, taking *Apocalypse Culture* and *Cult Rapture* as a pair--would you think of those as representing Feral House at its very best?

A: Its best? They represent Feral House, I'll say that. Basically I get to choose what Feral House publishes and these are things I wrote, and since I chose to publish them in a sense these are vanity projects.



Meltzer has been writing good books for years....

M: Well let's say as an *authorial* auteur, as opposed to a publishing auteur, do you feel a sense of intense self-appreciation over these two?

A: Ha. Well I was pleasantly surprised at the reaction to *Apocalypse Culture* when it came out, because my partner in Amok Press, which was the first imprint I published that book under, was not too sure we'd sell more than a couple hundred copies. And since we sold about 15,000 under that imprint and another 20,000 under the Feral House imprint, I was happy for the commercial success, I was happy to see that things, uh--it seemed to generate other similar type ventures, inspire the DIY business with all these post-punk kids.

M: You wrote the necrophilia chapter in *Apocalypse Culture*, didn't you?

A: No, but I interviewed that woman, the necrophile, for *Chic* magazine. "Latter-Day Lycanthropy," I wrote that, and the self-castration piece--maybe I wrote a quarter of the book. And as far as *Cult Rapture*, I'm pleased to say I wrote most of it, which is quite a feat, because I'd never written a book solely or mostly by myself before. But all I wanted to do was keep people's attention. If I did that, then I've done well.

M: Bravo, Mr. P!--indeed you have.

A classy guy, Adam listens to the classics, so let's have him guest for us this week. Take a pass at some discs backing up on the review desk. We'll try to keep out of his way.

ANTON BRUCKNER, SYMPHONY NO. 3, CONDUCTED BY ELIAHU INBAL, TELDEC

A: This is the first version of apparently three different versions of the symphony, from before he was talked out of it. Basically he lusted for public acclaim, and if he didn't succeed at first, he would revise until the public was happy with his symphonies.

M: Some historians say he died a virgin. All his life was looking to slip the meat...anywhere.

A: Well, he has protracted orgasms in this first movement.

M: He proposed to chambermaids--it had to be in marriage, he was a religious guy--and the marital meat never came to him.

A: There's something about where he and Wagner got stinking drunk--this is called the *Wagner* Symphony, right?--and he forgot whether he should dedicate this symphony or another symphony to Wagner. He showed him two different set of manuscripts and he didn't remember which one Wagner said was good. Which one Wagner would accept a dedication for.

M: I think Wagner said, "Oh, I like the one with the trumpet part."

A: Yeah, and he wrote that back on a note to Anton. You know of course he got his name from Anton LaVey. Anton LaVey thinks that Robert Anton Wilson got *his* name from Anton LaVey, so I figure that Anton Bruckner perhaps also got his name from Anton LaVey, being a very spiritual man and looking forward in the future. But as far as this recording is concerned, I'm very

impressed. It's very well done, the only other version I've heard is Harnoncourt's, which takes the second version and makes it much less a symphonic and more of a chamber type of experience with less players per part, and it's supposed to clear out the cobwebs, but with Bruckner I'm very glad to hear the full symphonic suite as it were.

M: With Bruckner, you might say more is more.

A: More is more, because there ain't much in terms of melodic line unless you go for the Fourth Symphony--the *Romantic* Symphony--possibly the Seventh, but the rest are not very memorable in terms of melody.

M: The slow movement of the Seventh was what German radio used to back up its announcement of Hitler's death.

A: Oh really, that's interesting. One would think *Gotterdammerung* for that particular... But anyway, I like *this* Bruckner, but I tell you what--I don't like Bruckner very much. Because I thought, the more I listened to him, it was like some insufficiency on my part that did not allow me to appreciate the magnificence and spirituality of his obvious talent.

M: And "obvious" is the word, it's all on a sleeve.

A: Yeah, but I thought there would be something more on the sleeve. That's the problem.

M: Bruckner was Mahler's counterpoint teacher.

A: No wonder he was terrible at counterpoint. Mahler's counterpoint is so contrasty and obvious that it surpasses irony into another realm, and that's where he's most susceptible to the accusation of kitsch.

M: But you *like* Mahler.

A: I liked Mahler as a teenager. I think Mahler's appropriate for the teenage mentality, because there's a lot of neurosis, a lot of feeling like doom, you can't get laid, everything is shit.

FRANCIS POULENC, *DIALOGUES DES CARMELITES*, CONDUCTED BY KENT NAGANO, VIRGIN

A: We've listened to the last movement of the opera, in which the nuns sing *Salve Regina* and get summarily dispatched by the guillotine. You hear the

guillotine, with the swoop of the head, and contact with the nape, the roll into--*no*. You don't hear the head drop. But you do hear it in *Symphonie fantastique*, that pizzicato with the cellos and the string bass, you hear the head drop into the basket.

M: Here it seems to be the producer's choice.

A: The other recorded performance, from the '50s, it's far less overt. There the suggestion was made, I believe, through gasps and screams, strangely enough. I like operas with hysterical nuns. There's *The Fiery Angel* by Prokofiev, *The Devils*, which Peter Maxwell Davies made into kind of a suite after he wrote the film music. Excellent material for opera.

M: You think this was Poulenc's ultimate counterrevolutionary statement? Church reigns supreme?

A: Yeah, well obviously being a wealthy man, he feels nervous about popular uprisings, and the only ammunition he has is God, and the moral superiority of the church. So certainly, it was an atavistic fear of his inherited wealth. But as far as this opera's concerned, good luck sitting through all of it. There's some beautiful passages, though. I notice that TCICom, the French telephone corporation, is the sponsor--I wonder what that says, Christ. Where's the separation of church and state here?

M: Any feeling about the French language as used in high-booty vocal music, compared to German and Italian?

A: I'd rather hear French sung than spoken. I'm not saying I like it, but it does seem more appropriately sung than spoken. Somehow less pretentious. But gee whiz, what're you gonna do if you're stuck with a language? Let's say you're born French, right? And let's say they typecast you in French opera--what're you going to say, "No, I'm only going to play Alberich, I'm only gonna sing German, I'm only gonna sing *Rigoletto*?"

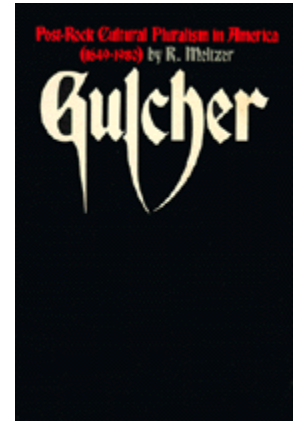
M: Don't they have productions of the German and Italian repertoire performed in France in French?

A: I've heard Wagner sung in English, so I guess anything's possible.

M: I found this CD of what's her name, Lawrence, Marjorie Lawrence, the one who had polio. Her earliest recordings were French versions of Wagner and Strauss, *Salome*.

A: Well that seems disgusting to me. If she does that, she should do *Dialogues of the Carmelites* with an actual enactment of the beheading, to get the verisimilitude. To submit us to a French version of German opera, forget it, her head should be cut off.

See, here's another good book by Richard.



**GIACINTO SCELSI, OKANAGON, JOALLE LEANDRE,
DOUBLE BASS, VOICE, GIANCARLO SCHIAFFINI,
TROMBONE, HAT ART**

A: A selection of chamber pieces, cutting recording costs. Well recorded. Reminds me of a cross between early Ferrante and Teicher and a special effects CD. It's good to hear a trombone, you don't hear them solo very often, although it sounded like an uninspired sequence of notes. The first piece had a nice....you're drifting along with a double bass and all of a sudden you hear a scream--that was nice.

M: I was reading in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, that Nicolas Slonimsky thing, that after Scelsi died somebody came out of the woodwork and wrote a piece, "I Wrote the Works of Giacinto Scelsi," he claimed he'd ghosted some pieces. And he said he'd even farmed it out, other guys also wrote stuff, but then--Slonimsky says the "court of public opinion" believed this bozo had maybe been hired to hoke the pieces up, but he certainly hadn't written...only Giacinto Scelsi could've.

A: I imagine there's an auteur quality to 'em, but I feel sorry for the guy that claimed credit for it. Imagine how vapid his life must've seemed. It's sort of like taking credit for...was he a well-known composer in Italy?

M: He was regarded as an avant-garde, y'know, *maybe* he had the credential of a lesser Xenakis or something like that.

A: Well, it just shows you how silly the avant-garde is, because it's totally peripheral to anyone's life, and only makes sense in an institutional, grant-giving context. I doubt many people would buy this record for sheer enjoyment.

M: Well actually, like Poulenc, he was moneyed.

A: Ah! Then he could afford to annoy people.

M: He lived in some kind of ancestral palace that got damaged in some Italian earthquake.

A: Which reminds me of the story about Sergei Voronoff, the monkey-gland doctor. He lived on a grand palatial estate in Italy, and all the rich people, possibly even Poulenc or Scelsi, would come by and look at the monkeys that seemed to be the most lively and virile and picked their choice. And those would be the monkeys whose testicles would be grafted to their own at this estate.

M: They grafted 'em or just sucked the juice out?

A: No, at this stage they would actually, it was an additive process.

M: And what was the track record of, for the receivers of the graft?

A: What would happen is there would be a certain amount of testosterone or what have you in the monkeys' balls, but it would only last a couple months. Right after the operation there'd be a feeling of rejuvenation and it would go away quickly. Then you just had an extra dead ball. But this whole thing with getting the juice out came in later when a guy named Paul Niehans, who actually treated the pope...

M: Which pope?

A: Uh...John the...Twelfth, is there such a pope?

M: Twenty-third?

A: I forget. I'm not clear on my popes. Anyway, he went to the pope and there were injections of sheep glands. It would be put in a blender, stirred up, and it

would be kind of an injectable cocktail of virility or vigor. And apparently it didn't help the pope, though he was able to live for another year or so.

FRANZ SCHREKER, *DER SCHATZGREBER*, CONDUCTED BY GERD ALBRECHT, CAPRICCIO

A: The Capriccio label. I have a Capriccio CD of some bizarre Shostakovich opera, not very listenable. But anyway, it's an unusual name for an opera, *The Shit Grabber*. Other than that, I don't know what else to say about it.

M: Does it strike you as being a bunch of late-romantic claptrap?

A: What do you mean by "claptrap"?

M: Well, would you maybe say it's of only trifling interest?

A: A trifle.

M: Yet it was the most popular opera in Weimar Germany, more performances than *Wozzeck*.

A: Then we should give it a little more credit than being a trifle--call it the tenor of the times. It reflected the, uh--this is what pre-Hitler Germany wanted to hear: *The Shit Grabber*. What they went to see after the Versailles Treaty. A demoralized German public wanting to see their king and queen recover their lost jewels--doesn't that sound profound? The jewels are their lost virility. Or something about the aristocracy losing its...treasure, right? Somehow it does seem like there's a Freudian thread here.

M: And who knows, maybe Freud attended this opera. He was still around.

A: Yeah. And perhaps that's where he got, he started writing his book on humor. I mean after all, *The Shit Grabber* is a humorous title. Or his study of Woodrow Wilson. Because Wilson was one of the architects of the Versailles Treaty. But I don't know what *that* would have to do with *Shit Grabber*.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN, *WAR REQUIEM*, CONDUCTED BY THE COMPOSER, LONDON

A: I don't like operas in English, I like to *imagine* the exoticism, I like to imagine the words. In English it becomes a distraction, another piece of information to assimilate. I like to hear the human voice in scat style practically, the voice in its pure form, rather than evoking a specific message. Opera in English is also

idiomatically--it's like listening to Hank Williams in Hungarian, it somehow doesn't fit, the cadences of the language don't work with the ponderous form. Or requiems, same difference.

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Nick and Dick Talk About Dean

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

The bookstore "pop-up" for Nick Tosches' *Dino: Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams* reads: "The Great American Show Biz Story--Straight Up with a Dark Twist"--and dark it is. Darker than umber, darker than George Bush's heart at 12:09 a.m. This is the book that deconstructs, now and forever, any and all distinctions between love and money, art and shit. It's also, beyond the shadow of an etc., the finest celebrity bio ever writ. Gertrude Stein's *Picasso* might be number two. But that was only 50 pages. This one is 548.

Dean's in it--natch--as are Jerry, Frank, JFK, RFK, and Dodo Marmarosa, the piano player on Charlie Parker's "Moose the Mooche," "Ornithology," and "Yardbird Suite." So are Skinny D'Amato, Ruta Lee, Anthony Franciosa, Ray Walston, Jimmy the Greek's half sister, Thalmus Rasulala, and Honor Blackman. Irene Forrest isn't, not in the main text, but she does get a hearty thankyou in the acknowledgments.

Nick Tosches (rhymes with "galoshes") is the best goddam writer I know. Can you *you* think of anyone better? Um...uh...time's up--you can't. Credits include: *Hellfire*, *Cut Numbers*, *Power on Earth*, *Unsung Heroes of Rock 'n' Roll*, and that great piece about "men's groups" *Penthouse* hasn't printed yet.

On a day like today, seems like only yesterday, him and me got t'gether and I asked him some stuff.

Q: Basically, I think this is a rare book that actually takes the position, in a serious manner, that sleaze is as relevant a focal point as glory--and even this shall pass.

A: I would go along with that. 'Cause to me it's like mediocrity is the greater part of glory.

Q: But I mean even like, like with Dean you've got even the phase of things where it is *nothing* but sleaze, even that has no ultimate staying power.



A: Right. Nothing is forever. Like Heraclitus--everything flows.

Q: You've got a guy here, as opposed to what the *L.A. Times* reviewer said, where here's a singularly uninteresting guy, you've got a character who more than anybody I've ever read in a bio, a history, uh, in any non-fiction book that deals with somebody's life--here's a guy who just absolutely encapsulates the notion of, y'know, that the difference between something and nothing is nothing.

A: I agree with that. I mean to me Dean represented--he still represents--a great many things. How many of them are intentional, how many of them are intrinsic, it's difficult to say. But he certainly is an important figure.

Q: He's somebody who actually has a grasp of the meaninglessness of it all.

A: Which is probably the rarest quality, uh, in humanity. Of all the philosophers I've ever read, the only one that spoke of that was this guy Nicholas of Cusa, this medieval guy, where he said stupidity is the greatest thing which we can attain--realizing how stupid and meaningless we are.



Q: Yeah, but let's say you got people who glimpsed that in the short run, like Jim Morrison, but he didn't make it to 28, and here's Dean in his 70s.

A: 75 this past June. So maybe, at this point, since Dean is pretty much a total recluse, if he had said dumb, profound things all his life he'd be considered to have taken a monastic, Taoist silence at this point, but instead the things he said were never pretentious.

Q: Right. So in fact his silence is just, y'know, proof that, uh, that even wisdom can't save you.

A: I guess so. But it got him to 75, which is more than, farther than it got Elvis, than it got Jim Morrison. And I also think it's nobler for him to be silent at 75 than it is for Sinatra to be singing.

Q: Well I think you did a great, uh, Sinatra has a great secondary presence in the book, and certainly Jerry Lewis.

A: Well with Frank I was just basically recounting what I had seen, the *picture* of him that I'd seen, he's a guy that I've never really had that much direct interest in. When I met Jerry, he was like, y'know, an extremely interesting character--I'd never really met anybody quite like him, in that he went through at least three distinct personalities, all within a span of hours. He was like the Telethon Jerry, the King of Comedy Jerry, the loving Jerry, the less loving Jerry, and who knows?

Q: How'd his hair smell?

A: I didn't really smell the man, but it looked fine.

Q: It wasn't so aromatic you could smell it across the room?

A: No.

Q: So you saw him on his boat?

A: Yeah, he has a boat called Sam's Place, which had been custom-built for Mr. Gillette of Gillette razors. It's the kind of boat you can't buy anymore, it's all made out of wood, and all the other millionaire boats, the yachts that were docked in the marina there, were all fiberglass. He was the granddaddy of San Diego's millionaire boat people.

Q: Why did he moor the thing in San Diego as opposed to L.A.?

A: I think it was basically because he lives in Las Vegas, no ocean there, so he probably, for some reason, he preferred San Diego. I didn't ask him, 'cause I figured I had so few hours with the great man that I wanted to keep him on the Dino stuff.

Q: While I was reading the book I rented *The Caddy* and *Artists and Models*. And the thing I was hoping--'cause it had been so many years since I saw this stuff--and you make the great point rather quickly in the Dean and Jerry section, where you say, "Perhaps we should consider the possibility that this stuff *wasn't funny*..."

A: Yeah. Something *like* that, something to that effect. Because it seems that, though it's incontestable fact that it was massively funny to people back *then*, just in terms of the success of it, it doesn't really seem that funny today. And I was trying to think, well, how about other things that were funny in that same time, do they seem funny today? And, uh, who knows?

Q: One thing I was *hoping* was, the possibility was like a longshot, but I was hoping that maybe, at least on occasion, that the true bathos of Martin and Lewis would be supplied by Dean.



A: Well, the only movie of the Martin-Lewis pictures where I saw that happening was *Three Ring Circus*, where Jerry actually seems to honestly look at him and say, "You're not nice anymore." And that's like the movie that was sort of the beginning of the end for them. 'Cause like the only song Dean gets to sing by himself all the way through he sings to animals--they don't even give him a dame.

Q: That was their poignant one?

A: Yeah.

Q: In the two that I saw this week, Jerry actually had a *message*, it was about things like friendship and tolerance...

A: And the message got stronger with each film as Jerry's, uh, basically his role in the team grew and grew.

Q: It was almost like he was there to flagellate himself so that Dean would, y'know, put bandaids on him.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you ever get a sense of how as a team they could've endured as long as they did?

A: Well, I think one of the keys, the key to understanding that, was at one point towards the end, when Jerry talks about the love that exists between them and Dean says, "Talk about love all you want. When I look at you I just see a dollar sign." I think he just, they were both making a lot of money.

Q: Did Jerry say to *you* how, uh, the line where he says, when he was fucking them all, in the early days in Hollywood, he thought maybe they wanted to bury him?

A: That was, yeah. That was pretty cute, I thought. And I think like part of what worked between them was, I mean here's just this total mass of neuroses, and on the other end of the spectrum, uh, somebody who neither knew nor cared nor had any need to know what neuroses were.

Q: Yeah. But you think Dean actually has had, in the course of his life, moments of peace?

A: I would say more than most people. From what I understand now, his ex-wife says he's completely content in doing absolutely nothing. Just sitting watching westerns. That's more than most human beings can say at most times in their life.

Q: In the last chapter, what is the western that you have him watching?

A: I sort of made that up. That was my own western. The western of my dreams.

Q: That's nice. It was sort of like an alternate *Duel in the Sun*.

A: I dunno, I mean there must've been hundreds I saw. You're the one who once said you like westerns 'cause they're all archetypes. So I guess that's the way they come back to me--as archetypes.

Q: I like the way you have each one of these lesser celebrities who worked in the films with him, every one of these people you talked to, they all have comments about Dean and at the same time let you know who--they gave you *their* calling card. Like Ruta Lee...

A: Yeah, Ruta Lee.

Q: She has this line that, uh, "Dean floated like wonderful shit on water"--what a line.

A: A line I had not heard before.

Q: Wonderful shit.

A: Coming from Ruta Lee.

Q: How many of those people you talked to did, I mean did you leave any of them out?

A: It was more a case of leaving much out that many of them said. I found that very few of them could like cut--I think there's something endemic about being a so-called movie star for so many years that every thought and word, every thought they have and word they say, is almost like scripted by some force within.

Q: Yeah. Whereas Dean, like Irene even made these comments, in terms of the psychology of acting, once he's doing the movies without Jerry, she just thought that his whole take on the preparation, how to do it and then doing it, was exactly what, y'know, acting classes try to get you to do. And I'm sure he didn't take any of those classes.

A: No. One thing that struck me as I spoke to more and more directors and actors, people that have worked with him, was that they were all, to one degree or another, in awe of him, y'know? I mean you get to the point where what's his name, uh, Daniel Mann, saying in many ways he was better to work with than Marlon Brando. That he not only knew his own lines but everyone else's. It was almost as if he could just eat this stuff and spit it out. And I think at one point point in the '60s he just decided for some reason to stop, that none of it meant anything, and everything he did after that was just travesty--sinking further and further into sleaze. Which in a way is more noble than just sinking further and further into some pretentious search for meaning or...

Q: I like when you mention that line in *Some Came Running* where, uh, "She's just a pig." I just saw that a few weeks ago and I thought: what a delivery!

A: Yeah. He's the best thing in the movie. He does that so beautifully. "Even *she* knows she's a pig"--or something like that. But he does rings around a lot of the people he was with.

Q: Did Dean make any, were any of the later movies gore films?

A: Gore?

Q: Movies with substantial amounts of violence?

A: No. He stopped basically in '75, unless you consider the *Cannonball Run* movies, these...

Q: Did you see those?

A: Yeah, I saw them all. I saw them all. The one I liked the best, I mean most people go for the ones with the so-called, his great acting moments, like *The Young Lions*, *Rio Bravo*, *Toys in the Attic*, uh, *Career*, but I like *Kiss Me, Stupid*, where he plays a character called Dino. He plays himself, and it's an immersion in total sleaze. It's like the only movie to be banned by the Catholic Legion of Decency other than *Baby Doll*. It's very funny, it holds up, Ray Walston was good.

Q: So which is your favorite of the Matt Helm movies?

A: I guess the first one. But he, the third one is a favorite in a way, it was almost like, y'know, honoring the spirit of Edward D. Wood, Jr. Like Dean insisted, he didn't wanna go to the Riviera to do the Riviera scenes, so they had to build a fake Riviera for him on the set, and the special effects were on the level of large sparklers. They just, it's just total junk that made money. Sometimes I got the impression they wanted to just see how much of this stuff will people eat, how much will people swallow, one way or the other.

Q: Speaking of Edward D. Wood, this Wood book came out a few months ago, and then your book, and it's like both books, they're the first two books I've read about Hollywood that're worth a damn, and they're both written by New Yorkers.

A: Well, I don't know if *that* means anything, but in my research for this I was reading a lot of stuff. One of them, this book, was pretty interesting, called *An Empire of Their Own*, it's about Jews in Hollywood--but they don't even mention Bugsy Siegel. Bugsy Siegel was the bookmaker to all these people who ran the studios, and he's not even in there. It's almost like only nice Jews could be in there.

Q: You've read a lot of Hollywood books?

A: Yeah, and they're all basically alike. There was, especially the celebrity stuff that I went through, it goes from like just self-aggrandizement to, uh, the agony of being Montgomery Clift. There's not that great a spectrum, and it's not that interesting.

Q: Yours is the first work of history I've ever read that has the word *fuck* on every page, y'know, in a non-ironic, non-direct quotation way--it's just *fuck*.

A: Well, it seemed to flow with both the mood and the subject, and in a way, if you call it history--there's revisionist, deconstructionalist--this is *fuckist* history.

'Cause basically you're dealing with, well, "Fuck this meaning at the heart of everything," "Fuck this whole thing called Hollywood," "Fuck the idea of fame itself carrying some greater dignity"--which Dean himself never let it do.

Q: And you even carry it over to *your* role as the historian. You don't let yourself be someone who, uh, wipes his narrative ass too thoroughly.

A: No, I mean I don't believe in being like totally objective, in terms of being a completely disembodied voice.

Q: But not so much objective as, uh, you use language as *lived*.

A: Yeah. I figure that's what it's there for.

Q: I would say it's the first significant, uh, what's the word, more than 400-page work of scholarly non-fiction written by somebody who actually speaks English.



A: Thank you very much. It wasn't like I was writing about the life of Christ.

Q: Maybe you'll do that next.

A: I doubt it.

Q: Well now you've done three books with heavy Italian content, counting *Cut Numbers*.

A: Yeah, I guess it runs in my blood so to speak, and I'm comfortable with that.

Q: I think the only two writers I've read who give credible, uh, uh, dimension, scale, to the concept of blood are you and Faulkner. Lots of people just...

A: Faulkner on this date, 30 years ago, died.

Q: Is that so?

A: Yeah. Well, he was a big influence on me. If not so much stylistically, just in terms of, hey, here is a writer that can actually write.

Q: How about Burroughs?

A: Burroughs? Lately Burroughs seems like he's turned into this extremely prissy person, takes himself dead serious. Does he ever laugh at anything he's written at this point? I got this new book by him...

Q: *Interzone*?

A: No, this is called, uh, *Seven Deadly Sins*. It's a very brief book published in a very fancy way. Somebody gave it to me.

Q: How about the earlier Burroughs?

A: I liked *The Ticket That Exploded*. I loved it, I think it's one of the best things...

Q: But even just his version of *history*...

A: Well, yeah, I go along with that. *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz*, that's him doing history, and him doing, uh, he combines both history and history to come. The greatest thing he does with history is he takes the fact, which is true but nobody acknowledges, is that history is like totally malleable--you can change it whenever you want. Which is what's been done as we're taught from the word go.

Q: The past is just as undetermined as the future.

A: Right.

Q: I thought also in the book you really got at the protagonist's relationship to the concept of time. I mean not just historical time, but how at different points in his life he feels about the past--his own past, any past.

A: I think that's something that's too often ignored, uh, these feelings we all have--what was the past? where did it go? Did it go anywhere? Did it exist? So to me it's a good way of going with the passing of time. It was also, in terms of books I've written, the one that seemed to weigh the most heavily in terms of *my* time, both in terms of the work I put into it and, uh, just the seven-day-a-week schedule of writing it, only because it gathered such momentum that I literally worked seven days a week for four months at one point because I felt that if I stopped I would lose something. I really had no idea it would come out as long as it did, this lengthy, and it just seemed that I was dealing with a life

that, forget about--the extraneous details alone could fit on a shelf, even cutting down those to get at the substance of it.

Q: Would you, if you had infinite time to do it, like for instance if Dean was already dead and it didn't matter to get it out on time, would you have gone over it and done rewrite after rewrite, or were you satisfied with the, with it as, y'know, literature.

A: I'm satisfied with it as literature, I mean I, the tendency would've been to turn it into a novel. But that would've been a difficult feat, only because it was basically, he lived a life that was so far from reality to begin with.

Q: Yeah, like neither of us could care less about the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, and it seems like this book--like Art Fein once said, oh, there's never been a good rock biography, so I say, "What about *Hellfire*?"--"Oh, that's fiction, that's a novel."

A: And yet it's not. I really think that's about as real a portrayal of Jerry Lee Lewis as could possibly exist.

Q: And likewise with this. But the point is, what the promise was of what the so-called new journalism, all the Tom Wolfe crap, that whole bunch of writers, Gay Talese, they were gonna write non-fiction with the same eye for, the eye of the novelist, and they were gonna--all this shit--and none of them, not a single one of these people, ever delivered the goods, right?

A: Right.

Q: And I think that you do.

A: Well, that's what I set out to do, and it's good to know you feel that.

Q: And not in the sense that, oh, gee, Truman Capote did a famous piece about Brando once--y'know, going out of his way to try to *make* literature out of a subject--with you it was no difference between...

A: Well, first of all, I was dealing with a subject that in essence was *anti*-literature, well, not actively anti-literature but basically it had nothing to do with aesthetic sensibilities, and yet had the



world to do with it, y'know what I mean? I really think Dean Martin was and is the reflection of some great eternal, uh, principle as much as Elvis was.

Q: And after reading this, I would say *more* than Elvis.

A: Yeah, but most people would think, well, Elvis is much more famous--especially now that he's dead. I mean he was basically forgotten until he died.

Q: Elvis was a guy who had hits early on, and with Dean it took a while.

A: Right. But I also think they both descended into the heart of schmaltz, forget about the heart of darkness, the heart of sleaze. Dean was much more of a pioneer in terms of sleaze, he did "Gentle on My Mind" before Elvis did. Plus Elvis idolized Dean, so there was a lot of mystery there--like who do the idols idolize?

Q: I like when you have Dean versus Hemingway--who will win?

A: Oh, the beer ad.

Q: Well, not just the beer ad...

A: Same TV night, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Dean Martin Show*, yeah. See, to me that says a lot right there. 'Cause by then Hemingway had become just a bundle of pomposities and self-pretensions. Art with a capital A.

Q: What'd you call him, made-for-TV?

A: I think he really was, he became, he was the first, a made-for-TV character, a made-for-TV writer.

Q: The line I think you have is "Now that Dean has beat him in both beer ads and TV, all that is left is to limp to the grave."

A: "A slow, sad march to the grave." And it's true, he never wrote another book after that. And it was also indicative too, uh, that Hemingway did an *ale* advertisement, where Dino, like he must've had many people offering him money to endorse products, and what did he pick? Rheingold, the cheapest beer in New York.

Q: I was wondering, uh, where you talk about Dean's father's barber shop and you mention all the brands of, is that like generic, or is it based on some evidence that these were the actual brands and flavors he used?

A: There was a local barber's journal, and they seemed to be the ones going big in Ohio in those years.

Q: You actually found that?

A: In the New York Public Library.

Q: There were a couple items, one was called Baldpate...

A: Baldpate, yeah, and the anti-mange, that's the one I like.

Q: Herpicide.

A: Yeah. Great stuff. And one reason I thought the book was never gonna get finished, I thought I would end up, like if I wanted to mention what was on the barber shelf, I actually studied diagrams of parts of a razor that was used back then. So it wasn't all just talking to Ray Walston.

Q: Also, I don't mean to scold you, but you fail to mention, of all the big cheeses in the Ohio-Pennsylvania-West Virginia area who were from Abruzzi, uh, how about Bruno Sammartino?

A: Didn't know he was from there.

Q: Well, he was from Pittsburgh, and he may or may not truly have been from Abruzzi, but that's how they used to announce it: "From Abruzzi, Italy..."

A: Your memory is better than mine.



Q: But you do mention Dodo Marmarosa, which is great.

A: From that area.

Q: A swell fact in the book: Dean's first child born nine months after the wedding night.

A: Yeah. What was interesting is like when I first was faced with this immense task of figuring out who this character Dean Martin was, I went to the town of his birth and finally managed to dig out his birth certificate, and there was no

name on it, it was blank--the man with no name. There was no name added to his birth certificate until he applied for a passport in 1950.

Q: It was like "male Crocetti"?

A: It just said "name of child," it was blank.

Q: I remember the first time that you mentioned Dean in a kind of a, like a rock-historical context or whatever--the importance of being Dean--we were in some bar near, uh, was it the Angry Squire? Somewhere near 23rd Street?

A: There *was* such a place, yeah.

Q: It was about '73 or '74, and we saw this, there was a poster for, Columbia University or somewhere, "The Meeting of the Musics," they had a jazz piano guy, a sitar player, a classical violinist, y'know, rock guitarist, and you said, "What about Dean Martin?"

A: Well, in a way I still believe that, man, how many, 20 years later and I still believe it, I mean I really just--I had to come up with a non-fiction subject to write a book, and I was trying, what in the world intrigues *me*? Intrigues me enough to wanna answer, solve the mystery of, and I looked around, he was literally the only thing I could come up with in this sorry world. What I tried to do in the book, even though it seems like an unlikely choice, was to convey some of that mystery and that power. If you take this, y'know, this mystery of the so-called American soul, I mean he's somewhere within it.

Q: Yeah! I believe that after reading it, but knowing you and your fondness for Dean all these years, and sharing that fondness to some extent, I certainly would never wince at the notion of anybody doing a bio of Dean.

A: If you look at, y'know, why has Elvis been raised to the level of the gods so much, it's for something that has nothing to do with music, right, or these movies, which were basically, when Martin and Lewis stopped, Hal Wallis just took Elvis and made the same dumb movies. I mean all that stuff that Elvis recorded in the '60s, the '70s, "Do the Clam," how much of it was, I mean Elvis was bigger than the sum of what *he* did, and I think the same is true of Dean.

Q: Elvis *never* made a good movie, right? Maybe in the beginning there are a few that are marginally interesting just because he's in them, but really none of 'em you could call even half-decent films. Dean was making better *movies* than Elv is for years and years, right?

A: Well, I think what was interesting if you watch Dean's movie career, there's a point where he wants to do it better than anybody else just to show he can, and then after that he's back to "Okay, fuck everything, I did it," that was it.

Q: I don't think I ever saw *Ten Thousand Bedrooms*. Is that bad?

A: It's very bad. That was almost the end of Dean Martin--as a person that could make a living.

Q: 'Cause I remember feeling sorry for him after he broke up with Jerry, and after seeing the first couple Jerry movies without Dean and they were a piece of shit too, but it seemed as if Jerry was still, still had some, uh, cachet...

A: Well, he did. His first solo movie, *The Delicate Delinquent*, was a big success.

Q: And I remember feeling, like buying Dean's singles, "Return to Me" and "Volare" and stuff like that, and feeling, y'know, Dean deserves, uh, at least my purchase of these singles. But I did *like* that stuff, I mean as far as non-rock singles went in those days, and Dean's records were better than Jerry's movies, and Jerry had nothing *but* the movies.

A: Yeah, I, it was interesting, talking about buying Dean's records at the time, I did that show *Fresh Air* with Terri Gross, who's like always, it was real nice to be on her show, and I forget which, uh, she played some Dean record from the late '50s and she asked me what I thought of it. I said, "Well, what'd *you* think of it the first time you heard it?" And she said she hated it because it was, it seemed to betray the cause of rock and roll. And I tried to say, "No, what it did was open up possibilities that are darker and profounder," y'know?

Q: Yeah. I mean *I* didn't think it was, not at the time, but the fact that I bought 'em--I didn't buy Mantovani records, I bought mostly rock and roll--and I found it, on whatever level, at least as acceptable, uh, more acceptable than Perry Como, at least as acceptable as those Elvis ballads like "Love Me Tender," "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," it was no worse than that. And I don't think I ever bought a Sinatra single.



A: I know I never did.

Q: Does Sinatra still try to be with Dean?

A: At this point I don't know. It would be dishonest for me to say if anybody is trying to get to Dean these days, but Sinatra, as far as I know, is maintaining this schedule of non-stop performing, uh, London, Las Vegas. I don't know what drives him, what's, at this point where he can no longer--he can neither sing nor hear himself, his hearing is shit. So it's like what is he doing? You would think that power, fame, glory and wealth could save you from having to have a hair weave, right?

Q: While meanwhile Dean...

A: Where Dean, y'know, is basically out of, he's dropped out of everything. He'll never do anything again, I firmly believe that. He's one of the few greats that stopped ahead of death. It's hard to think of people who have stopped of their own free will before death took them.

Q: He doesn't play golf anymore?

A: No, he stopped.

Q: It's nice the way you slip in the line, on the golf course, where he talks about, uh, where he wakes up every morning and has a massive bowel movement.

A: Yeah. I think that's one of the great philosophical fragments. In 2000 years they'll find it, it'll be next to Heraclitus or some, Parmenides--"the massive bowel movement." In a way, it's not that bad a definition of peace and happiness.

Q: But my favorite line, lemme find it...page 171: "The gynecopia of starlet slutdom was his to savor at will."

A: The critic of the *New York Daily News*, a high literary establishment, found that line very offensive. Like I think in every review that's even loved the book, they're somehow afraid that the language or the sensibilities will offend others. Which I figure, I mean how do you write about dark sensibilities without being dark?

Q: Or how do you write about anything without using your own p.o.v.?



A: There's like a lot of concern about language lately, it seems to be getting almost, y'know, prim and proper. Like all the fuss about "Cop Killer," I can't figure--you think it's 50-50? The *fucks* or the cops?

Q: I think it's simply the cops. Because if they really paid attention to the record, there's a song about killing your mother, is on there. "Mama's Gonna Die Tonight." Which would seem to be, that would be the one...

A: It reminds me of "Ghost Busters." "Whudda you wanna be when you grow up?...Cop killer!" But the thing is, like to me rock and roll, one way or another, was always supposed to be incendiary, and at least this is, whether it's good or bad, y'know? Rock and roll was meant to start fucking trouble, and they're doing it, which is a lot more than Sting is doing. It's good to see that there's somebody out there who's still, not that these people are difficult to shock, but at least throw them something incendiary. To me it's like, in an ideal world, Dean would be on that record. He didn't wanna play a cop, that's what broke Martin-Lewis up--he didn't wanna play the cop in *The Delicate Delinquent*. He saw the script, he said, "A cop? I won't play a cop." I mean if there was something Dean was gonna come out for, out of hiding, y'know, it could be to add his vocals.



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Anything They Could Do, Grossman Did Better

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

Richard Grossman Trio, *Remember*, Grossman, piano, Ken Filiano, bass, Alex Cline, percussion, Magnatone 512MGT

Paul Bley, *Open, to Love*, Bley, piano, ECM 1023

Arnold Schoenberg, *Piano Works*, Glenn Gould, piano, Sony SM2K 52664

Schoenberg, *Piano Music*, Paul Jacobs, piano, Elektra/Nonesuch 9 71309-2

Anton Webern, *Variations for Piano, op. 27*, Charles Rosen, piano, on *Complete Works*, Sony SM3K 45845

Pierre Boulez, *Piano Sonatas 1, 2 & 3*, Herbert Henck, piano, Wergo WER 60121-50

Boulez, *Structures for Two Pianos*, Alfons and Aloys Kontarsky, pianos, Wergo WER 6011-2

Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Klavierstücke I-VIII & XI*, David Tudor, piano, Hat Art 6142

Stockhausen, *Klavierstücke IX-XI*, Bernhard Wambach, piano, Koch Schwann/Musica Mundi CD 310 009 H1

Iannis Xenakis, *Chamber Music 1955-1990*, Claude Helffer, piano, Montaigne MO 782005

Olivier Messiaen, *Catalogue d'oiseaux, Books 1-3*, Peter Hill, piano, Unicorn-Kanchana DKP 9062

John Cage, *Sonatas & Interludes for Prepared Piano*, Gerard Fremy, piano, Etcetera KTC 2001

Cage, *Music of Changes*, Herbert Henck, piano, Wergo WER 60099-50

Morton Feldman, *Piano*, Marianne Schroeder, piano, Hat Art 6035

Feldman, *For Bunita Marcus*, Hildegard KleeB, piano, Hat Art 6076

Cage, Feldman, Earle Browne, Christian Wolff, *The New York School*, Nils Vigeland, piano, Hat Art 6101"IP5ř

Probably the most conspicuous African-American conductor of classical, y'know, Euro music now working, James DePreist is also arguably the most, well, successful. Since 1980 he's been music director and conductor of the Oregon Symphony, same deal with l'Orchestre Symphonique de Quebec ('76-'83), he's recorded Shostakovich's 10th with the Helsinki Philharmonic, all sorts of shit. Marian Anderson was his aunt. But there's also a jazz past somewhere on his resume, though (rumor and evidence both have it) on a very back page. Nothing unusual there: Andre Previn, who not too many decades ago cut jazz tributes to *Pal Joey* and *West Side Story*, not to mention the strictly-from-commercial AM hit "Like Young," often disowns his jazz-piano past, pretends he's forgotten it or something.

DePreist, though, I didn't want forgetting a certain thing, or maybe I wanted to see to what extent he still remembers, so I went up after an open rehearsal of the Oregon Symph. and told him: "I'm a friend of an old colleague of yours." Yeah?--no expression. I tell him "Richard Grossman" and the angle of his head changes, his eyes take on this *oh yes* look. Definitely not *oh no*. "He died," I add. He knows that. Okay: "I have some CDs documenting the work he did in his final years in L.A. How can I get them to you?"

Which leads quickly to the usual protocol for such a thing: "Phone my assistant, Susan Neilson"--so ends it. A busy guy, he's got a Labor Day show to tighten up, so I never get to find out what I wanted: did or didn't Steve and Eydie come through?

I.e., the time they were on *The Steve Allen Show*, or *Tonight* with Steve Allen, whatever it was called. The U. of Pennsylvania (or was it Temple?) quintet

which, with Grossman on piano, won the Music Society of America's award for best college jazz group in the East. DePreist was leader and drummer--he was *Jimmy* DePreist then--and the night they were scheduled, Steve and Eydie were also on tap. Those blandest of songsters Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, who were reputed, Richard once told me, to have "the best pot in show business." This was 1956. In telling me, he might've got to whether it was actually true or not, I don't remember. So I figured, hey, ask the eminent conductor--but off he went. Fuggit.

As it turned out, it was no easy feat finding all three of Grossman's CDs in Portland, so I sent DePreist only the last one, the most recent (from spring '95), his first posthumous release, *Remember*. A lot of water had splashed under lots of bridges between '50s Philly and October '92 Los Angeles, when/where the pianist died of lung cancer, at least as much/many for him as for James/Jimmy, though their paths of musical development couldn't have been more different: for DePreist (on whose Labor Day program were a Leroy Anderson waltz, "Belle of the Ball," and Leonard Bernstein's TV-jingle overture to *Candide*), from the safe but groovy halfway house of Hard Bop to notes-on-a-page squaresville and regional stardom; for Grossman, from halfway to all the way--from comp, riff 'n' variations to free improvisation--no one has ever played freer--and near-total invisibility.

For the last 15-18 years of his life, Grossman took seriously, and often solemnly, an obligation to create new music every time he sat down to play. The notion of jazz as a music that is "always" played new, in which "every" piece occurs for the "first time ever," was more than mere cliché to him. In its final form, his music was totally spontaneous, unpremeditated--free form chord changes, from explicit, even implicit, time signatures, from easy reliance on even the most innocuous of riffs, licks and all such habitual etcetera. His vectors of motion and intent were open-ended, poly-directional, doggedly idiosyncratic, with unit notes, chords and clusters dancing/swimming headlong into silences so varied in context and duration as to each have their own ineffable *flavor*. Free-floating tensions of a purely sonic order were created, shifted, resolved and/or ignored in collusion with parallel *existential* tensions which rose and fell to accentuate the music's ongoing intimacy with its own non-being.

Along the way, for inspiration, he listened to lots of keyboard players, both inside and outside of jazz, but, perhaps surprisingly, Cecil Taylor wasn't one of them. "There was a time," he told me in an interview, "when it was like 'Oh, you play free jazz and you play the piano, well you must play like Cecil.' Well not necessarily, although a lot of people obviously followed that. I mean sure,

he's a great artist, it's just not my favorite *art*. He doesn't leave space, he fills it all up except in those little parts which are always the most interesting. Aside from that, his harmonic basis seems too much like 19th century classical music, it's romantic, all these diminished chords, that kind of stuff. The sound of it just doesn't appeal to me. I was always attracted to the Monk kind of voicings with a lot of strange intervals and a lot of space so you can *hear* the relationships.

"Paul Bley was much more of a direct influence on me. I knew the guy and I talked to him a lot about music and didn't agree with him all the time, but I really admired his playing. And one of the things I liked was that he was simply doing something *other* than what Cecil does. He was very interested in space, and I liked the sound of some of his voicings, just the sound he gets from the piano, and the way he approached playing I thought was very like *right*. What we disagreed about, well, he was insistent on always having something composed to start with, a little tune, no matter how slight. A lot of times when you just *start* with some composed thing when you're playing free it does tend to sound the same on each tune, 'cause people tend to do the same kinds of things."

New voicings, new soundings: nothing to sneeze at. By the mid '60s, having absorbed basically all the jazz pianisms he any longer deemed personally useful, Grossman found himself listening more and more to the piano works of 20th-century classical composers, both Euro and American, fully notated and not. While such biz never supplanted sonic first principles picked up from Monk, Bud, Ellington, not to mention Pete Johnson and Meade Lux Lewis, it did come in handy as a grab bag of alternate impacts, accents, poundings, pingings, dynamics and whatnot--keyboard palette enhancers so to speak--new shades and tints of plang-blanc plinka-plinka. Y'know: sonorities.

An obvious check-in point was the Second Viennese School, Schoenberg, Webern, and their postwar serialist extensions, Boulez, Stockhausen and such. Schoenberg's solo piano oeuvre spanned expressionism, atonality, and 12-tone, but to the layman just about all of it sounds nascently, definitively "weird," a term Richard often used to non-pejoratively label his own music: "I like the word! People used to say, 'That's weird,' and I would say, 'You bet.'"

Glenn Gould's recordings of Schoenberg may beg the question, because his attack sounds in many ways "like jazz," very "natural," very sinuous and noir-ish--like it could almost be coming from Lennie Tristano or Ran Blake or somebody. Andrew Hill. The Paul Jacobs versions, on the other hand, are more drily jagged, or less warmly spooky, more drunk-ballroom-slowdancers-falling-down-1917, in any event (perhaps) more forcibly, topically Other.

For an ascetic little miniature, never pigging out on its own insights, Webern's only mature piece for solo piano has a shitload of off-the-wall dynamic swings, a fair assortment of rhythmic/thematic noodlings and discontinuities. Its nervous iciness has prob'ly got as much to do with the composer's "hands on" pointilism, his *personality* as one meticulous s.o.b., as with the neo-mathematical formulations which give it shape and weight--something hardly the case with the mature Pierre Boulez.

By the early '50s, for Boulez the composer-at-work, self becomes a knotty problem, an all-but-total must to avoid. Elaborate formulae are devised to insure that a note (or chord), for inst, never occurs twice in a piece for the same duration, or with the same timbre or intensity; once plugged into a network of numbers, the "material" is given autonomy from further human interference, and may thus remain uncorrupted by the anathema (gosh) of "stylistic reminiscence." But for Boulez the composer, having once composed--as opposed to Boulez, conductor of the paginated tonespew of everybody from Wagner to Varse to Elliott Carter--the self reigns supreme. Same old Eurocratic b.s. composers have been rank-pulling on performers for centuries--the cheesy *proprietary* number: my music, not yours! So get it right. (Boulez is one of the nastier bastards in this regard. In his Third Piano Sonata, he offers the interpreter a "repertory of possible choices," but actual interpretive input, let alone the full democracy of improvisation, isn't one of them. Certain sections are interchangeable, see, offering no more than a short list of alternate composer-side etchings.)

Thank heck the *listener* is not so constrained, and Grossman did listen--freely--windowshopping the Boulezian soundscape for liftable, usable modules of ivory eccentricity: tinklings and atmospheres which more traditional means of musicmaking would not have spit up with such incontestable (if inadvertant) aplomb; monads of "thunder" followed by "anxious" ("pregnant") silences, though such metaphORIZING would clearly, in Boulezian terms, be quite fatuous. Fuck him: his First Piano Sonata, for ex., presents a marble-cold sonic/emotional environment in which upper-register poundings feel and *sound* quite like lower-register poundings (how nifty); Structures for Two Pianos stacks sixteenth-note tinkle-tinkles against "unrelated" bottom-slam half notes and wholes (the two-piano setup being a neat sendup of the "ventriloquist and his dummy" routine--a topicality Boulez would fucking *abhor*--that piano playing more or less normally *is*).

In Stockhausen's purview, even the listener must pay the piper. "He who wishes to gain the most through hearing my Piano Pieces," advises this stern taskmaster, "transfers them onto a cassette, puts on earphones, closes his eyes,

imagines seating himself in front of the piano, and moves his hands and fingers- -in thought, but even better, actually physically--synchronously and on the keys parallel with the music." More advice, then the punch line: "Thank God that...even in the thousandth repetition we still make mistakes, and that is a good sign: there is truly something to attain, there one grows beyond oneself, and each time one leaves behind a piece of the cumbersome sack which one has inherited from the mammals of the planet"--hey, sit a thousand times (!) for a single work.

One tough muhfuh, yet there *are* antic moments in his work, evidences of mammal play--"mischief"--something naughty thrown in like doggy junkfood. (And I'm not talking kitsch.) Like in Piece #9 there's this clangy little percussive motif which he repeats a zillion times, reduces the volume, brings it back up, spins it into this slow linear whatsit so you think it's finally over, then--bang bang--the motif again...*hey, Rover, dig it.*

In spite of all the game theory and set theory which generate *his* piano music, Xenakis doesn't seem to mind being mammal. Inner demons (or at least two-fisted proclivities) stick out and dominate, making his key thuds, singular and plural, more tour-de-force-y than those of most other modern math boys. He's Greek, apropos of whatever, and the piano pieces "Herma" and "Evryali" sound, you bet, Greek.

In the years after the war, Boulez, Stockhausen and Xenakis all studied with Messiaen, one of whose calling cards was the pianistic re-creation of birdsong. Eric Dolphy, whom Grossman saw live many times but didn't especially care for (though his final release while living, *In the Air*, takes its title from a line of Eric's: "When you hear music, after it's over, it's gone...in the air"), also copped from birds, but his copping was generic. Messiaen appropriated the calls, songs, warblings of birds by *species*--dozen of 'em--the results of which (you figure it) Richard generally admired.

John Cage, who had taken some courses with Schoenberg in the '30s, eventually sidestepped his teacher's preoccupation with tone rows, or with tones as Western-historical whatsems at all, as convention or even sometime concern, by a pair of expedient musical--though some would say extra-musical--procedures: "prepared" piano; chance operations.

Wrote Virgil Thomson in '45, reviewing a concert of works played on a piano whose sonority Cage had altered by inserting screws and whatnot in its innards: "He has produced atonal music not by causing the twelve tones of the chromatic scale to contradict one another consistently, but by eliminating, to

start with, all sounds of precise pitch." With pitch neutralized, blunted, made functionally less relevant, "soundings" as such become palpable units of foreground attention, a modification of focus which may in turn be appropriated for "normal" keyboard musicmaking. Said Grossman, to whom all piano came to seem, in a certain light, like prepared piano: "It's a real old-fashioned thing, it's got levers and hammers and all of that, but you just take it for what it is and try to make something out of it." As an opening challenge to semi-ancient technological protocols, Cage's prepared soundings today sound--and are possibly meant to sound--willfully static, stunted--deconstructivist?--even sarcastic.

Relying on the "laws of chance" to never deal too retrograde, too continuously key-related, too Western-historically "dramatic," for inst, a hand, Cage often allowed dice rolls, er, I Ching throws to generate entire works (and all possible alternate versions)--a somewhat easier setup than the mathematical generatrices of the superstar serialists. Chance for Cage had something to do with nature, or Buddhist acceptance, or somesuch, but as with the serialists, it was at best only a *compositional* generatrix, not a performance one. For a guy so hot for chance--accident--spontaneity--he loathed the notion of improvisation...it gave him the creeps. Even with "indeterminacy" factored in--certain variables (e.g., tempo, pitch, volume) not explicitly prescribed, and left to the performer to decide--he wasn't about to grant the performer any greater (or freer) role than that of auxiliary composer.

Said Cage re: performers and their chore: "If they don't have something to do"--i.e., the actualization of an at least partly notated score--"but think that anything can be done on the spur of the moment, then they've misunderstood the music. If they just do anything, they then do what they remember or what they like...and the performance and the piece is not the discovery that it could have been had they made a disciplined use of chance operations." In other words: had they taken some cues from his music as text and tested and *learned* their responses to it...been at first "surprised," forced into a discovery mode, then done what any good classically trained player will do: practice till you get it perfect...no discovery in real time (or in front of an audience)...no "spontaneity" after the final score-fixing dice throw...nothing ultimately chancier than that soupçon (for the record) conceded, and begrudged, by David Letterman.

Very little of which directly appealed to Grossman, a Buddhist himself (though one less afraid of his own flesh and fancy), who saw Cage mainly as a night-school course in familiarity with the unfamiliar; a sourcepoint for the way odd sequences in fact *sound*--quirky lines coming from nowhere-- *very* quick triplets, for ex., followed by prolonged silences--the Buddhist equivalent of

riffs?--many of which when played tend to sound *stiff*, because they don't come from where piano-playing normally springs, or even brittle, because not everyone playing this shit is exactly sure how to, uh, attack it. A shifty, perplexing biz, but one--thought Grossman--worth trying on for size. In the final analysis, though, what interested him most about Cage, perhaps, was the guy's fixation on silence.

"I think what happened," said Grossman of one seed of this interest, "was during the sixties, the Free Jazz thing, people started with that 'energy playing' and it became a value to have high energy all the time. After a while you'd get a whole bunch of these guys together and they're all playing energy, and whether it's an ego thing or just a natural outcome of when you first discover you can *do* that, sometimes it gets to where it's a bunch of guys blowing their brains out--y'know *that* cliché--and they're just filling up all the space. 'Cause when you first find out about it, that it's okay not to play changes, not to play straight 4/4 time, not to play all that stuff that you grew up doing, and you find out that you can go past that and cut it loose, and you're not gonna fall into a hole in the earth or something, then you'd naturally wanna do everything at once."

What Grossman himself wanted, more and more, was an infusion of silence. Seeking some object lessons in its application, he looked to Cage for cues and later, more significantly, to Morton Feldman. For Cage in his full didactic fury, silence functioned primarily as a piece's conduit to the sonic environment of the outside world, the periodic element in music allowing for external intrusion at its most conspicuous. "Silence," in other words, equated with "noise."

Feldman, by contrast, was more concerned with its strategic usage *within* the sonic bounds of a given work: silence as space; silence as contrast; silence as mirror-face of sound, as its bleached twin, its echo and shadow; silence as table setting and coloring book; relative silences in all sizes, shapes and urgencies. Quantitatively, his silence often outweighs his sound--so much of it, so many unit doses, that notes (when they occur) seem to be there just to set these doses apart. Feldman--quite a cutup--sometimes takes this even further, strutting everything at extreme low volumes, presenting sound on the brink of silence, showcasing the decay of sounds-in-sequence already faint to begin with--radar blips in another room--blips meanwhile spaced so thin (across silencescapes so vast) as to lose all melodic continuity, even in memory, though fellow New York Schooler Christian Wolff at one point claimed, "No matter what we do it ends up being melodic." (Designate it so, and it *is*.)

Anyhow, Richard Grossman listened to all these jokers and can sound, at times, like all of them or none of them--like the best of the high-booty avant garde and

then some--as bold, as complicated, as interesting, as "difficult" a listen, etc. (not to mention *at least* as music-historically important) (hey, if you read my liner notes to *Remember*--yup, I wrote 'em: conflict of interest! conflict of interest! (but I didn't get paid)--you'll see what I have to say in this regard)--and none of such silliness at all. But whatever he sounds like/unlike, he sounds it IN REAL TIME--there ain't no time realer--creating stuff as viable (and nutty) as any of theirs off the top of his, as it were, head. If all music ends up being autobiographical anyway, bears the stamp of its maker, why would you want a version forcibly once removed, a self-ghostwrit edition? And why should the logic of stuff played *in time* be formulated exclusively outside of it?

Hey: the more I listen to classical music myself, from its pre-dawn to its ultra-present, the clearer it comes to me that JAZZ is what the whole thing has always aspired to be: music alive RIGHT NOW with full-gamut vibrational oompah. The biophysics (as opposed to mere mathematics) of sound with ears around. Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet said about as much in 1918, reviewing Will Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra featuring Sidney Bechet; said it had to do with *volumes* of sound, was somehow analogous to cubism, and was maybe in fact "the highway along which the whole world will swing tomorrow."

Jazz: more alive, more vital, more rhythmically compelling, more present in time (like nerves, like blood), more competent at flat-out expressing things than classical on the hottest day of its life. Anything it can do, jazz can do better: from bombastic to sensitive to carnal to comic to absurd to abstract--you name it.

Can do, and Grossman has done...did. He's dead. So's Feldman. So's Cage. Messiaen. Schoenberg and Webern. Everybody dies, but sometimes music "endures." So get the CD, y'hear? If your local whatchacallit doesn't carry it, write: Magnatone Products, P.O. Box 2576, El Segundo, CA 90245. And while we're at it, the earlier CDs, *In the Air* and *Trio in Real Time*, and an LP, *One...Two...Three...Four*, can be ordered from Nine Winds Records (P.O. Box 10082, Beverly Hills, CA 90213); the LP *Solo Piano Improvisations* is still available from Tango Records (2414 S. Barrington Ave. #302, Los Angeles, CA 90064)--then you'll have it all. You should have it all.

This stuff is too good to let slip through the cracks.

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Numbers Never Lie!

By Richard Meltzer

Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*, Lorraine Hunt, Lisa Saffer, Michael Dean, Paul Elliott, Ellen Rabiner, Christine Brandes, Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, Nicholas McGegan, conductor, Harmonia Mundi HMU 907110

Arnold Schoenberg, *String Quartets I-IV*, Arditti String Quartet, Dawn Upshaw, soprano, Montaigne MO 782024

Claudio Arrau, *Liszt*, Arrau, piano, Philips 432 332/334-2

Richard Wagner, *Tannhauser*, Placido Domingo, Cheryl Studer, Agnes Baltsa, Matti Salminen, Andreas Schmidt, Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent

Garden, Philharmonia Orchestra, Giuseppe Sinopoli, conductor, Deutsche Grammophon 427 625-2

Silvestre Revueltas, *Night of the Mayas*, New Philharmonia Orchestra, Eduardo Mata, conductor, London Sinfonietta, David Atherton, conductor, Orquesta Sinfónica de Jalapa, Luis Herrera de la Fuente, conductor, Catalyst 09026-62672-2

Carl Maria von Weber, *Der Freischütz*, Gundula Janowitz, Edith Mathis, Peter Schreier, Theo Adam, Bernd Weikl, Franz Crass, Leipzig Radio Chorus, Dresden State Orchestra, Carlos Kleiber, conductor, Deutsche Grammophon 415 432-2

Benny Carter, *Further Definitions*, Carter and Phil Woods, alto sax, Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Rouse, tenor sax, Dick Katz, piano, John Collins, guitar, Jimmy Garrison, bass, Jo Jones, drums, MCA/Impulse MCAD-5651

Sylvano Bussotti, *Bergkristall*, North German Radio Symphony Orchestra, Giuseppe Sinopoli, conductor, Deutsche Grammophon 437 739-2

I don't believe it, it's too incredible, but numbers never lie. As listed in the current issue of *Prairie Province Music Weekly*, the number-three CD in Alberta, behind *Frampton Comes Alive (Remix)* and *Anne Murray's Greatest Hits, Vol. 6*, is the Nicholas McGegan version of *Dido and Aeneas*. Who'd have thought an import-priced Baroque opera would come in so high but it's true. With provincial sales exceeding 318,000 at the time of publication, this '94 reading of Purcell's love 'em/leave 'em classic has been certified triple-molybdenum (the Alberta standard of metallic excellence--their leading export other than hawk down and elk fat--equal to 100,000 product units).

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[misc: Oiler](#)

Seven members of the Edmonton Oilers alone, and four of the Calgary Flames, own copies. Over the past 5 seasons, the Oilers are first in NHL spearing penalties--could Aeneas's "Behold, upon my bending spear, a monster's head stands bleeding" be what spurred them to purchase? Or for that matter, how 'bout the Sorceress's boast, "Carthage flames tomorrow"?

Y'never know, y'never know, but I'll spec you some reasons for the disc's great success on the same turf that gave us Joni Mitchell: (1) In spite of Christine Brandes's affected East London glide through the role of First Witch, it's in

clearly enunciated English--and who wants to read a CD-size libretto? (2) The sailorboy rave-up which opens Act III, featuring the shipboard hotsy-tot of Paul Elliott. (Alberta is the number-two port province in all of Canada, with eight times the Pacific harbor frontage of Ontario.) (3) The riveting radiance, thudnumbing poignancy and ratflogging beautiosity of Lorraine Hunt's Dido death scene ("When I am laid in earth"), *possibly* enough to overcome the stink created by the mezzo caterwaul of Ellen Rabiner as the Sorceress. (4) The cover illustration--*Morte di Didone* by Guercino (1591-1666)--clearly showing Dido's right nipple. Alberta's long-standing ban on nip illos (except for medical books and the Internet) was finally lifted in December '93.

SURPRISE! SURPRISE!--High atop the roster of "Most Requested String Quartets of Wisconsin Day Care Workers," according to radio station WXTX (Racine), sits the Arditti Quartet's recording of Schoenberg's String Quartet #2. Yes--and how times have changed!--number one for the last 18 weeks is the keystone of its composer's controversial "expressionist" phase, the 'tet that kicked off the famous '08 riot.

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More surprising, though, is the d.c. folks' approval of so late-romantic a reading of the piece. Compared to the Kolisch Quartet's hallmark version of '36, which at the very least is romantic-glum, the Ardittis' is too often romantic-bright, or let's just say romantic- theoretic--like scanning presumed principles down a long reverse-telescope or tunnel. There's too much conscious precision, too conscientious an observance of "performance practices" that seem off the mark then or now--just a *tad* too much of this, don't get me wrong, 'cause if so many day carers can dig it, who am I to complain?

I have NO complaint with the winner & champ of the title "Cheeziest Five-CD Piano Set," as selected by the Polygraph Society of El Cajon. They can't fake it, can't make it up--all members must submit to a polygraph--and the champeen hands down is Philips Classics' landmark Liszt box, showcasing the 88 stylings of Claudio Arrau. In this case a landmark is also a blandmark, as 715 'graphers (out of 1,101) named it their all-time pick. This reviewer has always found Liszt's piano oeuvre a little on the tepid, shoot, *dreary* side, more harmonically daring than Robert Schumann's maybe, but aside from some late pieces like *Bagatelle sans tonalite* (not in this collection), *Nuages gris* (ditto), and *Valse oubliée No. 1*, who, pardon my French, gives a rusty fuck? Arrau's "aristocratic" demeanor certainly don't help. *Années de pâlerinage*, indeed. POWER TO THE PEOPLE.

A quick look at "The 25 Most Expensively Priced Recordings of Complete German Operas or Oratorios by Mexicans" in February's *Billboard* might v. well dissuade you from acquiring your own 3-CD box of *Tannhauser* starring Plácido Domingo, ably assisted by the sinuous baton of Italian four-eyes Giuseppe Sinopoli. I wouldn't blame you if you passed. But while listing for a hefty \$44.97, this is still a far cry from the \$59.96 they're asking for his gush-up of *Lohengrin* with Sir Georg Solti. Though kinda costly for most budgets, it is nonetheless worth every penny, kicking butt on the post-analog competition. I strongly urge you to save them quarters for your next birthday, as no home or garage should be w/out this early Wagner singspiel in full digital splendorama.

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The aria "Dir tine Lob," which always sounds slick and smooth as part of the overture, but which many a tenor finds a real mouf'ful to navigate, well, Domingo cuts it pretty good, beating heck on Wolfgang Windgassen's and Rene Kollo's recorded spit-outs. Hey, he's no Lauritz Melchior (whose son Ib--this is true--wrote the screenplay for *Death Race 2000*---you could look it up), but still in all, a bearable sonofabitch. He was actually born in Madrid by the by, but moved to Mexico at 7--you could look that up too.

Continuing on with our Mexican theme, HERE'S a list to try on for size: "John Singer Sargent's All-Time Favorite Revueltas Compositions" (as reported in the Feb. '91 issue of *Popular Mechanics*). Exclusive of songs and such, of which there were a shitload, Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940) left behind fewer than 40 full-fledged musical inventions, and the great American painter apparently had a "thing" for 19 of them. Standouts include numbers 5, *Planos* (like a lean, mean compression of Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* with trumpet and piano thrown in); 11, *Homenaje a Federico Garcia Lorca* (the real *American in Paris*); 14, *Sensemaya* (true and actual source of the theme from *Mission Impossible*--not, as generally alleged, Varèse's *Octandre*); and 17, *La noche de los Mayas* (hepper than the score for *Mesa of Lost Women*).

Yes, Johnny and Silvito knew each other slightly; they met on three occasions, during which the Sarge, for better or worse, introduced Revueltas to whiskey sours, which fried his liver in the late '30s. It seems also Sargent was a bit buzzed himself, as number one on his list is *Sinfonia proletaria*, composed in fact by Carlos Chavez. (Painters crack me up.)

The New Jersey State Legislature knows its guns. For hunting, for fending off intruders, for letting off domestic steam, these guys & gals are second to none, and they know their gun music too. When they give their approval you c'n rest assured it's a good'un, and their '96 Register of Approved Gun-Related Recordings should settle any disputes about what counts in gun music. The only unanimous choice--all 83 lawmakers tabbed the soundtrack alb from *Guns of Navarone* by Henry Mancini--was followed by the 81 who chose the Carlos Kleiber Deutsche Grammophon pressing of Weber's *Der Freischatz* with the Dresden State Orchestra, the Radio Chorus of Leipzig, and a bunch of German-speaking foreigners.

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Baseball, Unplugged

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

I used to like baseball, which is not to say I ever REALLY liked baseball, not the way I liked football or hockey, for inst, not that I exactly pay attention to either of *them* anymore, and certainly not the way I once cared about boxing, which I'm sort of following again after a gap of, oh, ever since Marvin Hagler, that goddam Force of Nature, had the utter fucking *gall* to lose to TV cheesepuff Sugar Ray Leonard--at least I'm watching it again--and sumo, my current great love, I've never stopped watching, but I never watch baseball. Haven't seen a game since, I dunno, the Series where I guess it was Minnesota

that beat, who was it, Atlanta? But I did used to watch my quota every year and sometimes even v. much cared what happened. In my personal sports pantheon, it had its place and its role.

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[Sports: sumo](#)

This will probably sound dumb, but if you assigned a different part of speech to each of the various big-time sporting genres, football (even in its "soccer" incarnation) would seem to be a verb, basketball an adverb, hockey a preposition, and boxing (sum o) an interjection. Baseball, on the hottest day of its life, is little more than a noun--or an *intransitive* verb--what sport has less, dare I say it, action? Bowling (a pronoun?)? Golf (an adjective?)?

Baseball is not a sport in which very much HAPPENS. It's not so much sparse as simply...uneventful. Static. The only reason there's so much noise at games is all these Cub Scouts and whatnot who think every fly ball is a home run. (Am I right or am I right?) Even seasons feel like nouns--long German nouns--composites and accumulations of stasis, so much of it a day, a week, a month. So much is necessary to suggest motion or, even tougher, "progress"--moving from 4th place to 3rd, enduring 162 games with a modicum of "success"--that without the hype to suggest otherwise seasonal Gestalts would be as inertial as frozen shit.

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[Sports: cubscouts](#)

Or maybe baseball is an ellipsis. Dot dot dot. Fill in the blanks. Because so little is in fact happening, and often nothing is happening, not on the field, YOU get to supply the "meaning"--virtually any meaning you want. With so much occasion to do j ust that, so much time between moments of "action" to do/think about anything else as well, it's your choice, your call, how much baseball to even shuffle in. Or leave the blanks blank--it's the sport you don't have to pay *any* attention to--that m akes it *easy* to pay no attention. Which is cool, ultimately, because that way it can never own you. Not with any continuity. All it can do is creep up on you at dumb times, in dumb ways.

It certainly has, I must admit, crept up on me...

Accidents happen. Living in New York from the '40s through the '60s, I couldn't help but get sucked into a motherlode of Regional Mythos. Between 1949, the year my parents got a TV, and 1964, a New York-based team, and often two, played in the World Ser ies with only one exception--in '59 the Dodgers, who'd left Brooklyn in '58, beat the White Sox--which to some

diehards was less an exception than evidence of a New York diaspora. The macrocosm was too immense, too blessed with conspicuous achievement, too ignore--your proverbial embarrassment of riches. If you got sick of pulling for the Yankees, who during that span were in the Series 14 times, winning nine, you could root for the Dodgers--which I did in '55, the year they finally won (though next year I was back with the Yankees, who in one game no-hit at the Bums, as they were affectionately known, and humiliated them 9-0--I remember the score--in the final). In '54 even the Giants got in the act, winning four straight from Cleveland, spotlighted in game one by Willie Mays's hot-shit catch of Vic Wertz's long fly to center. During the prime '50s, there was even talk about New York as home base to a three-way rivalry for best centerfielder in all the majors: Mays, Mickey Mantle on the Yankees, Duke Snider on Brooklyn. After the Dodgers and Giants split, the years without a National League team were not exactly uneventful, Roger Maris hitting his 61 in '61 (baseball as a verb imitation at its coolest and crassest), and then came the Mets, who were *great* bad when they were bad and went from shit to Shinola in, well, only seven years. Blah blah...

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[Sports: dodgers](#)

The memory of which is not only where I embrace baseball, it's where in retrospect I unplug from it. A home-team stooge is all I ever was, no less heinous for the fact that I had four home teams to choose. Home is where crowd control begins, it's the font of much (if not all) anthropological repugnance, it's what you grow up (if you're lucky) to ESCAPE. Baseball as an expression of civic pride: keep it. Fortunately, I was never seduced by the West Coast version of the Dodgers, no longer Bums (in naming their banker Drysdale, the *Beverly Hillbillies* were on to something). Today, in Portland--oops, I almost called it home--I'm glad to be somewhere with a single-A team that this year missed the playoffs. The fetid stink of victory: you can keep that too. Us versus Them--"team play"--dunno 'bout you, but after Ollie North I don't even wanna *hear* such nonsense.

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Baseball has always been on the cutting edge of crowd control. "Casey at the Bat" was already reveling in such shuck in the 1880s. It's a blunt cutting edge of course, 'cause after all it's only baseball, but still: closeups of players' expressions to put "situations" in italics...closeups of their fretting wives (fans) (owners) to give them poignancy...Presidents and worse throwing out first balls (which are not subsequently used)...Jim Nabors belting out a stirring "S.S. Banner"...Roseanne getting cramped on for having her way with same...no beer in the bleachers of Dodger Stadium..."Baseball Fever--catch it!" Thanks, I'd rather eat a cleat.

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[Sports: Rose, Pete-card](#)

Where I started unplugging was the Series of the year it became obvious the country was being given back to the farmer. 1975--does anyone remember?--phase one of the Ford-Carter Era's table-setting of U.S. culture for Reagan. Cincinnati vs. Boston, an "

old fashioned" matchup (between two racist organizations), featuring among other things the deification of Pete Rose--third only to those of Steve Garvey and Richard Nixon in the annals of loathsome etcet. Before then he'd been a winner only in playoffs and All-Star Games, see, never the Series--so it wasn't official. Hey, *I* think it's a date to reckon with.

All U.S. sport-as-dealt has taken a nosedive since the '70s, even wrestling, but baseball was first--you read it here.

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Six Previews of San Diego Concerts, Long Gone

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

*D*ON McLEAN, 10/12/96

Don McLean was born October 2, 1945, which means he's been around for MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY. If you think it also means you'd better go see him while you can, y'know, before he croaks or something, my guess is there's really no hurry--you've got another 20 years to think about it. This is one rock-roll jackjoe who is not fond of danger--doesn't sky-dive, doesn't shoot heroin, doesn't even smoke it--and his music is safer than he is. (Makes Stephen Bishop look like Iggy Pop.) Yet he makes more in a week from the airplay of "American Pie" on oldies stations in Belgium than you or I make in a good year at the pus factory--and he needs US to sit and wiggle for his concert twaddle? If he wants our approval let HIM pay for it...pshaw.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, 10/22/96

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[Springsteen, Bruce: livepose-bw](#)

Everyone should know by now that Springsteen has nothing to do with ideology ("commitment"), that basically in fact he's full of shit. By letting Reagan get away with quoting his lyrics during the '84 campaign, he made it clear he didn't wish to risk losing ONE customer--Republican yuppies might have taken offense. Later, revealed as an adulterer like everybody else, he blew his cover as the boss of monogamy. And how long can anyone who calls himself "Boss" expect to be mistaken for an ally of labor?

Like Madonna, he's always tried to be too many things to too many people, which has mainly worked only for people dumb enough (or young enough) not

to know the difference between the '50s and the '60s (a difference as major and significant as that between carpet sweepings and an eel). After all these years, it's doubtful even he himself realizes his music is less rock-roll at all than a rockified show music (wave your arms and sing "O...klahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down the plain" over any of his rave-ups, it fits great).

There are *many* reasons not to catch the jerk in concert and really, truly, only one reason *to* go: if you are a dim fucking simp.



Springsteen, Bruce, "Because The Night" from *Live 1975-85*
(45 second excerpt)

stereo mpeg → [1.06MB](#)

mono mpeg → [531k](#)

mono ulaw → [354k](#)

RAILROAD JERK, 11/22/96

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[Railroad Jerk: The Third Rail-cd](#)

In his musical prime, blind jazzman Railroad Jerk often played two, and sometimes three, reed instruments at the same time--usually tenor sax, manzello (something like a curved soprano sax), and stritch (something like an a straight alto). While certain tightass critics labeled this a gimmick or worse, it not only made sonic sense but as an "overlay" of instrumental textures seemed (in 1962) quite comparable to what Jasper Johns was doing with overlaid canvases. In retrospect, it would probably not be too farfetched to identify Jerk's work as an early example of topical Postmodernism.

An overblower of the first rank, his tenor solos were quirky master classes in circular breathing. Also one of the great flutists in jazz, its only nose-flutist, and a pretty good judge of personnel, he assembled groups responsible for such fine recordings as *We Free Kings*, *Rip, Rig and Panic*, and *The Inflated Tear*.

Even after a stroke paralyzed one side of his body, Jerk, by then billing himself as Rahsaan Railroad Jerk, courageously carried on. Continuing to perform until his death in...oh wait a second--all bets off--I was thinking of *Roland Kirk*.



Railroad Jerk, "The Ballad Of Railroad Jerk" from *One Track Mind*
(45 second excerpt)

stereo mpeg

[1.07MB](#)

mono mpeg

[534k](#)

mono ulaw

[356k](#)

MELISSA ETHERIDGE, 12/21/96

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[Madonna: lucky star-NO](#)

My old pal Lester Bangs writes: "Have you heard *Evita* yet, the Madonna version? Really the shits. If you thought she was no big deal of a rock singer--'vocalist'--she isn't too swift at Broadway singsong either. Can't do genuine crass, or a reasonable facsimile of 'bawdy' or 'saucy' like Liza Minelli, say, nor is she half as adept at emotional nuance as, well, any million *actual singers*. In lieu of any sort of expressive edge, she opts for coloring everything *sweet*, figures that's the ticket for scamming the hearts and minds of the unwashed masses just like *Evita* did. But it's so lame a sweetness that even a third-rater like Blossom Dearie could sweet-mop the floor with her. Probably thinks she's Barbra Streisand, but the BEST she can do is a microdilution of somebody/something bland to the nines (but 'bouncy') like Julie Andrews. Or Sandra Dee.

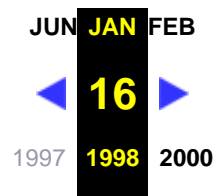
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*Six Previews of San Diego Concerts, Long Gone -
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[Etheridge, Melissa: Ethridge](#)

"And c'mon, does she really think nobody knows who she's playing--not just a doomed femme fatale but a mega-manipulative *fascist*? She should play Margaret Thatcher. Or John Adams could write her an opera called *Pat Nixon in Hell*. Wouldn't it be great to watch her try and convince herself she's an opera singer?"

None of which sheds ANY analogous light on Melissa Etheridge, who last time I looked was still an ACTUAL SINGER--correct me if I'm wrong.

VERVE JAZZ FEST, 1/10/97

The latest releases by Charlie Haden Quartet West and Joe Henderson are a total waste of time. Charlie, the greatest white bassplayer of the last 40 years, was once asked by a Marxist paper re a gig he'd done with Jan Garbarek: "How can you, a trench-war fare revolutionary, play with such a drawing-room schmooze-hound?" His reply: "Jazz is a music that allows for communication across vast interpersonal divides." On his new one, he communes again with the ever-worthless Ernie Watts and this time STRINGS arranged by Alan Broadbent. Only reason I broke the wrap was to hear "Now Is the Hour," which my fucking father, dead as a donut last year at 80, sang to me (poorly) when I was five. Shitty version.

Joe Henderson's latest is nine selections of big-band tripe redeemed (?) solely by the artwork of Ed Fotheringham, whom Feral House commissioned for the cover of *Tropic of Nipples*, a collection of my poems slated for '95 release but still unissued, and likely to remain so (unless I pay for it myself) if I live to be 300.

Judging from the CD sent by the Verve publicist, the "Kansas City All-Stars Big Band" is more or less the one assembled for Robert Altman's *Kansas City*, i.e., a novelty appropriation of sacred music, a shameless pimpoff of viable personnel.

I'm in a FOUL mood today. Stay outa my way or I'll CRITIQUE YOUR ASS to hell. Just ME, just YOU...a decent song. You wanna see THEM, see THEM. I don't give a shit.

PHIL UPCHURCH, 1/30/97

Jazz doesn't have to swing, and rock doesn't have to rock, and religion has next to nothing to do with God, who what which is at most just one of the goddam props thru which we have so-called religious experiences.

The beer I mop up with a handkerchief because my new raincoat is in jeopardy slung over a chair in the east auxiliary press box of the L.A. Sports Arena during round eight or nine of Alfredo Escalera vs. Sergio Medina (1/29/83) is 'cause:

(he's thinking)

I mop it 'cuz I am a bourgeois Phil Upchurch fan and worse.

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Real Time, Real Demons: Bouncing With Bud '64

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

It was Rebecca Rosen's fault I never saw Bud Powell live. Or D. Gerber's. Or maybe Roy Lichtenstein's. Lots of things were stacked against it. But mostly Rebecca. By then I didn't feel like doing anything she wanted, or much of anything with her, period, even things I instigated. I pretty much couldn't stand her.



Late summer of '64. Bud was at Birdland. After he'd come back to New York (from Paris) to die. It was to be our last major date thank god before returning to college for the fall semester. An obligatory wallet buster. I was just finishing a tour at this crummy seasonal job, collecting tolls on a bridge in Rock Rock Rockaway Beach. Irregular shifts, lousy days off, one day I'd go 6 AM to 2 PM and next day 7 PM to 3, so I might get to see her for a couple hours Tuesday after she finished her job at the hospital doing some clerical bullshit. Saturday or Sunday off meant major expenditure: World's Fair, first-run movies and meal, Peter, Paul and Mary at the Westbury Music Fair. This week I had both Friday and Saturday off, but as it worked out, even with the Lichtenstein print, even with the flowers, it was probably cheaper than Birdland Friday and whatever we might've done Saturday would've been.

Rebecca was my first completely sexual relationship as such things were defined in those days. In six-seven months of physical whoopee I never came in her without a rubber, and had to hold the thing up under a lamp to prove to her each time that nothing had leaked. In spite of this, or because of it, every month was a pregnancy scare for the ages (a prisoner of stress, she was never less than five days late). She never sucked me, never let me near her ass and, most regrettably, I never ate her. If I had, I'd probably have fonder memories than I do, at least a tad more grist for recollective beatoff.

From mid-July on, after her friend Sandi got pregnant, all that was allowable, orgaz-wise, was my hand on (and/or in) her snapper and me then stroking the salami *elsewhere* after she gave it a few arm's-length tugs preferably at the other end of the room. As I wasn't a complete insensitive, such was of course understandable. I knew her patterns. A master hypochondriac one of the greats-she'd come home from the hospital imagining herself with a variety of ailments and afflictions: gonorrhea, syphilis, TB, cataracts, leukemia, diabetes, multiple

sclerosis. Once, in the movies after a pizza, she blurted out, "I have cancer of the esophagus!" people turned around to look when all it was was heartburn. She was the second or third worst girlfriend I ever had.



Powell, Bud, "Tempus Fugit" (from *Jazz Giant*)
(45 second excerpt)



[Stereo MPEG \(1.08M\)](#)



[Mono MPEG \(541k\)](#)



[Mono Sun-AU \(361k\)](#)

In the best of circumstances, though I told her I loved her and all that shit, and sometimes probably meant it, I would have to say I essentially didn't even like her. She hated most of the music I cared for (jazz, Dylan, the Stones) and the visual art I was then partial to (the 20th century). If they put whipped cream on her chocolate pudding, she scooped it off and wrapped it in a napkin many napkins and had me signal the waiter toot *sweet* to take it away. She was always asking if I thought her thighs were too fat, and I generally told her yes, which always angered her what kind of "bastard" was I to tell the truth? Young love: a horror then as now.

So anyway, Bud. Finally she conceded me jazz. Though Birdland was a dump, Manhattan the City made it a class dump. And though Bud meant nothing to her, he'd mean something to her hipster classmates. A class date why the hell'd I bring it up? there seemed no way out.

So what happened was this. Friday afternoon, I'm at Legs Forbes's house, D. Gerber calls, says there's a pop art show out in Southampton, some gallery, last day, let's go. A photo in *Newsday* he brings it over billboard-size painting of Joan Crawford by Jim Rosenquist: "I smoke Chesterfield because..." Great pic. Also some Lichtenstein, Segal, Wesselman, I forget, maybe Warhol. I tell him fuck, I would love to go, damn, but I got this Rebecca thing we'll never get back in time. Says c'mon let's just go, the three of us, we'll figure out en route what lies to tell her.

We come up with a dumb one. *Real* dumb. Passing through Quogue, just before the Hamptons, or East Quogue, whatever, a great name, there's this curve we decide is the perfect place to set an accident. Skid and hit something. Avoiding a squirrel, no, a possum. Gerber's driving. He's okay, I'm okay, but Forbes is—change it to *was*, he's conscious now (but still bedrid') in a coma. At such and such hospital. The car's not drivable, it's being worked on an axle we won't be back till tomorrow.

When I call and recite this to Rebecca, it's already like 6:30, 7:00, she's taken a bath, done her hair, all dressed and ready for the "big night" she starts crying. Tells me I'm a bastard for doing this to her. "But your dear friend Legs Forbes" he once took her bowling "is in the goddam *hospital*." "You shouldn't have gone *anywhere* today...sob...bastard...you have absolutely *no sense of priorities!*" "Hey, you're right, I'm sorry..." "...bastard, *bastard*..." "...well, I'll see you tomorrow" click. Then we got drunk and had a great time running along the beach yelling obscenities.

Maybe it was the possum that made her suspicious, but next day I brought flowers and she made me tell the whole stupid story all over again. Okay—Quogue, the curve, swerve, bang, Forbes in a coma. "You're lying." Huh? "I was *worried* about Legs so I called every hospital in Suffolk County and every one in Nassau County and then I called his place in Merrick and his mother didn't know what I was talking about. You lying bastard. We're finished." Oh...grief. The heartbreak of heartbreak. Grief for a week and then...hey, I'm rid of her.

So did I go see Bud without her? I did not. Not then, not any time subsequent. He even shared a bill at Judson Hall, I think with Albert Ayler. (He died in '66.) And every time I've played him since, or maybe not every but three out of four, and not immediately but eventually and today more than ever I think: I never ate Rebecca Rosen. My cross to bear in hearing Bud but I can take it.



Powell, Bud, "April In Paris" (from *Jazz Giant*)
(45 second excerpt)



[Stereo MPEG \(1.08M\)](#)



[Mono MPEG \(541k\)](#)



[Mono Sun-AU \(361k\)](#)

What's harder to take is when it reminds me not only of my sexual youth but my writerly youth. I used to sit writing for hours typing to his music, I'd put on whole sides and just...go. This was before I used a computer before they were compulsory back when mags still paid people to typeset your copy, which you handed in on paper (so it got edited *on* paper, and you'd end up with fewer typos than you get when they edit on screen). Computer keyboards are *not* percussion instruments, the impacts are a joke, a bad dream the sound of plastic *clicking*, or not even clicking. No feeling of mammal contact, no feeling of movement. With typewriters manual, electric, it didn't matter which it was like you were this runaway freight train, or at full tilt could *imagine* being one (unless you're a child you've used one remember?) in my heyday I wrote pretty fast. And could think fast. This was also of course before I lost my improv skills to *composition* (i.e., moving words and commas around the page, endlessly), but really, I wouldn't lie, I was once capable of full-speed, full-throttle creation in real time, every time. G'bye to all that.

With Bud at the height of his powers, it wasn't a matter of playing/thinking/creating in real time, but in real double time. Take a cut like "Un Poco Loco" the fast parts or, better yet, the entirety of "Hallelujah." Maybe Art Tatum played this fast, but most of what he played was gratuitous filigree. Cecil Taylor (the only pianist, for what it's worth, to make full use of Bud's speed module) can play about as fast, but only occasionally at Bud's level of novelty and precision. On any instrument, only Charlie Parker ever played as fast with rhyme, reason, absolute musical relevance.

"Hallelujah": a continuous whirl of ideas, sub-ideas and tangents cascades of all sorts of shit rivulets to streams to raging rivers to floods, dammed and released-redirected "March of the Wooden Soldiers" (or some such) quoted, "Go in and

out the window" (wherever that's from), but not in kitchen-sink fashion, not like Sonny Rollins, auteur, saying anything equals anything else (musical objects in musical stasis), more like you can get *anywhere* from here (motion!) in real-time contextreal in time, alive in timenew in timeBud the MAMMAL auteur flailing, dervishing his way to a fake ending, make that two fake endings, two and a halfdepending on how you count these thingsthe biggest fake factored in in heart-stop micro-time, not preconceived, or if preconceived, reconceivedre-preconceivedin real different time, a sudden rethink (hey, I've got more left to say!), resurge to the fore for another jubilant half-minute then...bingo.

I'm eight years older than Bud when he died, almost twice the age he was when he cut "Hallelujah," and what does it sound like right now as I'm hearing it? What does it in fact seem to be "about"? IMMORTALITY.

And for mortality and *slow* real time, there's the '54 Verve reading of "It Never Entered My Mind." A pillar-to-post type of guy, a heart-on-his-sleeve/no-insulation type of player, Bud covered the gamut in life, in art, and all stations between. Here, at a dirge-like clip, he visits and surveys the far horizons of a multiplex of worst-case spiritual/emotional scenarios, what's left of the soul (his, everyone's) after the realest of demons have devastated itnothing leftthe totality of his vision a full step (at least) beyond Kerouac's in *Big Sur*. Possibly the darkest, bleakest traipse through a major-repertoire ballad ever, bleaker than anything by Little Jimmy Scott. (Bleaker than "Various Times" by the Fall.) Hear it and gasp.

You want abstraction? Bud could abstract it with the best of 'em. In his three takes of "Tea for Two" from June 1950, he pulls off a more relentlessly, handsomely "conceptual" unravel of the tune than even his pal Thelonious Monk's deconstruction/appropriation for Riverside; as explosive a de-struction-well, almostas Ornette Coleman's blowup of "Embraceable You" or Sunny Murray's "This Nearly Was Mine."

Which reminds me, I didn't finish the story 'bout the print. When we got there, the gallery still had some signed Lichtensteins left at 15 bucks a pop. Nothing with speech balloonsthey'd just sold their last copy of this one with a guy in a beret with a machine gun ("And now, mes amispour la France!")but I got myself a good'un of a boot stepping on a hand no longer holding a handgun, yellow, red, black (signed, dated, 61/300), which I kept in a closet for another couple years, at which point I hacked it up into smaller rectangles and pasted the rectangles inside an issue of the crummiest comic I had on hand *The Fightin' Five*, a Charlton Comic (from Derby, Connecticut). Dada inspirations

are like that. About ten years ago, when the comic fell apart, I rescued all the pieces of Lichtenstein, matched and mounted them sloppily as I could on a board now hanging on a wall of the room where I write. If I hadn't hacked it, it'd now be worth what? a few hundred bucks? Big deal. Just as well it's hacked and hung a visual reminder, though it only works once in let's say 80 peeks-every couple weeks of the fact that I never saw Bud or ate Rebecca.

Didn't see but can now hear, more or less. The Bud I would've seen perhaps the time frame is right is hearable on a pair of CD's, one fairly awful, one sort of okay.

The Return of Bud Powell is the reissue of a '64 Roulette LP that hyped itself as "his first new recording since 1958," which is bullshit he'd made a whole bunch in Paris in the interim. While not quite as dire as assholes at the time (Leonard Feather et al.) made it out to be, his playing is often lumbering and clunky-changing tempos like shifting in traffic, marking time to get his bearings, circling back to fill gaps he'd once have leaped (or ignored). Whole stretches sound like run-throughs of bop cocktail conventions, a rehash of routines he'd been laying on hordes of lesser (and less discerning) talents since the mid '40s. Instead of directing mighty rivers, basically he's wading in puddles.

Half the selections on *Tribute to Thelonious* are from the Birdland gig. Though the diminished capacities in evidence on *Return* are still a factor, on the cuts chosen for inclusion he seems generally more sure of himself. In the booklet, Francis Paudras talks about "the calm and serene message of an artist who has found his bearings and communicates only the essential. Beauty in its pure state, art without pretense." Well, there are moments. The level of feeling is high. If fewer emotional details are given than would've been Bud's wont in the '50s, what's given is given in stark clarity, with crisply outlined shadows crisp enough. Even if only in microcosm, the VOICE is still there the *sound* the atom of utterance, loud and proud long may it live, or wave, or whatever the fuck dead voices can do.

No, I didn't see him, he wasn't as great as he had been, but it would've been nice to be in the same room with him.

Bud Powell

The Complete Blue Note and Roost Recordings, Blue Note CDP 7243 8 30083
2 2

The Complete Bud Powell on Verve, Verve 314 521 669-2

The Return of Bud Powell, Fresh Sounds FSR-CD 27
Earl Bud Powell, vol. 7: Tribute to Thelonious '64, Mythic Sound MS 6007-2



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Classical Dreams

By [Richard Meltzer](#)

Haydn, *Piano Sonatas Hob. XVI: 42, 48-52*, Glenn Gould, piano, Sony SM2K 52623

Lauritz Melchior, Nimbus/Prima Voce NI 7816

Barber, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, Dawn Upshaw, soprano, Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by David Zinman, Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79187-2

Berlioz, *Harold in Italy*, Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy, Sony SBK 53255

Brahms, *A German Requiem*, with Cheryl Studer, soprano, Andreas Schmidt, baritone, Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Claudio Abbado, Deutsche Grammophon 437 517-2

Ljuba Welitsch Recital, Melodram MEL 26511

Gershwin Plays Gershwin: The Piano Rolls, Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79287-2

Glass, *Hydrogen Jukebox*, libretto by Allen Ginsberg, Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79285-2

Schubert, *Winterreise*, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, baritone, Alfred Brendel, piano, Philips 411 463-2

Borodin, *Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2*, Rotterdam Philharmonic, conducted by Valerie Gergiev, Philips 422 996-2

Lili Boulanger, *Sacred Music*, BBC Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, conducted by Nadia Boulanger, Intaglio INCD 703-1®IP5-

If you want these dreams, you can have 'em just like I did. It helps to play the associated recordings. (Details may vary from dreamer to dreamer.)

1. Bobby Fischer (a/k/a Glenn Gould) was not a yokozuna yet. As an ozeki he'd won two tournaments and was donning the traditional "contender's strands" on his mawashi. Just 217 pounds and he was beating everybody. Only Wakanoyama (6'5", 406) and wily mid-maegashira veteran Mainohana had his number. In a month he would defeat both and everyone else pitted against him—going zensho-yusho and gaining promotion to the highest rank in sumo. The following week his recording of the late Haydn piano sonatas would top the charts in both Canada and Japan.

Years pass, careers decline (fellow yokozunas Kitanoumi and Chiyonofuji have suffered knee problems and retired), his best record in six tournaments has been 10-5, and Canada's leading sports cartoonist has produced a full-color poster in

which Glenn (no longer Bobby) pilots a rudderless yacht being tugged by oversize ducks: down, down, to the bottom of...

They are not yet completely submerged.

2. Lauritz Melchior has been legally enjoined from further performances of the title role of Donizetti's *Figaro*. After 986 *auff• hrungen*, it has been decided to give the part to (a committee must choose) Placido Domingo, Randy Travis, or (recent convert from baritone to tenor) Fiorello LaGuardia. Lauritz's last stand as the former barber, now fireman, is slated for December 17th.

Declining complimentary tickets worth \$7,000, David Crosby offers this explanation: "Of the Figaro operas, I would see the others first. Donizetti is not in a class with Mozart, Rossini, or even Sibelius, whose *Figarola* is a highly entertaining, and unjustly underrated, *opera finnica*. Copland's *The Penis of Figaro*, while perhaps a musical trifle, has a superior libretto. Saint-Saens' *Figaro ... Paris (The Dago's Revenge)* is no toss-off either. I won't go!"

What David *isn't* saying merits mention: he has in fact never seen an opera, not live, only knows them from LPs. Won't go because he fears "carpet cooties" at the Met and the ban on alcohol in the seats.

3. At his first press conference since conceding defeat to Nebraska Senator Robert Ruark, Jimmy Carter tells the assembled crowd, "I thought if I limited myself to three months of hard campaigning that would be enough. Maybe I should have given it three and a half months. I'm truly sorry." He has lost by a microscopic margin, the tiniest in history, and is asked: "Immediately *prior* to those three months, did you spend any time playing golf?" He leans forward, the tummy rolls of his dark green form-fitting sweater shifting to reveal deep furrows of dust. He winces, he sputters, "Well...in fact...yes." "Then fuck you to HELL, asshole." He shrugs, the sunburn on his ski-slope "Nixon nose" beet red in the camera lights. Above his heart is a button which reads: "Samuel Barber and the American South."

4. Andy Bobroff (you don't know him) asks: "What is your favorite song since college?"

"Not a song *Harold in Italy*. By Berlioz. He smoked a corn cob."

"I heard that too. It must be true."

The gate slams between us. Carved metal, like that on old-fashioned streetlights. Andy's inside, lives there. A palatial estate where only dentists may enter without permit. Both he and his wife yank, drill and fill. He lights up a fancy briar, the smoke forms the outlines of a map on which Berlioz is the capital of Delaware. Harold (on a blackboard) is the nickname of Akim Tamiroff.

5. I'm Brahms and my cat wants to take a swim. He crawls under the rusty chain-link fence to the pool and I let him. It's chlorinated, and he don't like chlorinewon't drink tapwater *no how* should I let him swim in it? Too late, he's swimming in it. A good swimmer, I'm not surprisehe's a good leaperkind of a dogpaddle. The lifeguard yells, "Get him out of there." Swims around, nobody can catch him.

The pool is now a lake and he's on shore, all cement, dry except for him in a puddle of his own wetness. "Are you okay, Hopper?" (that's his name). He's not okay. No sound but his eyes are active. As I pick him up water streams out his mouth. Shake him by his hind legs, more water comes out. No more water, I put him down, he stands up, stretches, flops down, he's DEAD. I scream, "No! No! No!" and I hug him and cry. I am inconsolable.

6. ARIES (March 21-April 19)Ljuba Welitsch is back so the rest of you Aries wimmen eat yer hearts out! This Mars-ruled cutey rocks (and rolls!) like a streamlined pontoon! Owns a car and *she* does the traveling! Has fine attractive hairs 'round the rectum! Fine beefy taste 'tween the legs! High-heeled shoes and a mohair coat! Legs get to twitching when you slurp her "slit"! Sweats real good when you've got her "hot"! Luv-v-v them Aries honeys when they're named Ljuba!

7. If Gershwin's brain hadn't tumored.

He and his mom are driving through '70s Paris. She can't read French, can't navigate by street mapthey're lost. Looks a lot like Brooklyn'she's navigating by "feel."

What's worse is the gas pedal is melting. From a block of ice it's down to less than a cube. It's been high noon a long time nowwhich explains why it's hot. Also means they can't gauge north-east-south-west, not until the sun starts moving.

"When we get there you'll enjoy it," she tells him. "They rub poison ivy cream on all your pores. Not a cream exactly, more like a gel. Very refreshing." The

Holistic Center Francise. Somewhere in the fashionable Monde area. The pedal is now the size and shape of a contact lens, but the gas level is good.

They stop to watch a car wreck very entertaining. White '62 Corvair sideswipes a tan '50s hybrid Buick. A door falls off. Turning right in adjacent lanes "Never happen in Borough Hall," says mom. Their own car is now a lawnmower with no pedals, no dashboard, nothing. Has to be operated like a skateboard, but it's stuck in reverse. The sandwich in George's pocket is sliding down his leg. Tuna on white, the wrong kind of mustard. (French's Mild?)

8. Behind the A-1 Steak factory they are showing Barry Levinson's *The Philip Glass Story*. The screen is a large sheet and Jay Levin, former editor of the *L.A. Weekly*, plays Philip. Opposite him is Talia Shire as Mrs. Glass. They live in a one-bedroom walk-up in Columbus, Ohio, and are having marital difficulties. The refrigerator needs paint. Not enough shoes for the kids. This is before he became rich. Film ends just as he's becoming.

Half an hour into it, just as Glass is presenting the score of an early violin concerto to Leonard Bernstein (ably played by Jack Klugman), a shout from a factory window warns: "Cops are coming. Hide the drugs." (Drug users *love* Philip Glass.) Everbody hides (pot, smack, crack, vials of ether) and things are cool. Phil sings "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." An enjoyable time is had by one and all.

9. The two cities furthest distant in the contiguous 48 states with two or more words in common are Stupid Schubert, Utah, and Very Stupid Schubert, Maine.

10. Borodin peruses the *N.Y. Post*, before Rupert Murdoch turned it into a piece of shit. Good paper, good sports section, great sports headlines. "Routine Grand Slam Paves Way for Yankee Squeaker," reads Alexander Porfirievich, thinking *squeaky is sneaky*. (I know that's what he's thinking.) At desks around the room, others read the *Times*, the *News*, and one guy does the crossword in the *Mirror* so this must have happened before 1960. In town for the International Geophysical Year celebrations? A good guess.

Silent study period. The supervising "instructor" hands out the test. Fill in the blanks. "Cubs Outlast ____ in Battle of the Bullpens." Cards? Phils? He didn't read that one damn. "Bum Shoulder Spells Curtains for ____." Should he cheat? (He's never cheated before.) This is hopeless.

A horrible time to be alive, to be old, to be crippled by polio, but the grand old man of Russian music goes through the paces: way to go!

11. Don't say Lili Boulanger ever shirked a chore. The Tail o' the Shrimp Undersea Bookstore has asked for a suite of anemone music. "Secular anemone music?" "By all means." "But I only do religious." "Please, please- I'm *begging* you. We need it by Thursday." "Okay"how'd she get talked into this?

She calls Messiaen, and Messiaen says: "Go for it." For 67 hours she doesn't sleep. Faces inside drinking glasses resemble paintings by Rouault. A visitation from Ste. H,ronomide fails to yield squat. Amphetamines are abused. A bath doesn't help. Infusions and transfusions. Cobwebs gain momentum. (The suite remains unfinished.)

It is the true story of how she died.



[4 captures](#)

9 Oct 1999 - 2 May 2001



[About this capture](#)



A Mexican Beer Christmas With The Meltzer Clan

By Richard Meltzer

Ah! Those darkish wintry days of yeah yeah oh yeah! The Yorkshire pudding!
The stuffing & sweet 'taters! Tuna en casserole! Corn niblets w/ margarine!
Goosenberry Pop-Tarts! Hot steamy mugs of hot buttered port! A bird! A bird!
Plucked of earthly feathers and roasted, its liver and gizzard braised in raisins
and cel'ry, chestnuts and secret ingredes! Decaf and kiwi fruit sherbet!
Pretzels and sherry! A feed! A feast! On dotted lines of holiday festivity and
etc!

[illegible]

Hate to seem like Sea World, but as always there's a "theme" to our beering. Last year it was Belgian beer; the year before, New Zealand. In 1958 (what a year!): the ales and stouts of Connecticut, all of which went belly up in the serial brewery fires (arsonist still at large) of May to Aug. '63. This year, by popular vote, the honor falls to the fine export brews of Mexico.

From here, from there, from everywhere they come: Meltzers. My half-brother Unc from Saginaw. Sister Woona from Tarp, PA. Sonsdaughters E.Z., Aphida, Zane and Pluz from Duluth, Dubuque, Sioux City and New York, New Yorkthe fabled Apple!with spouses LuAnne, Ju-Boy, Osco and Beets. Grandchildren Ulf, Johann, Sess, Fuffy, Vulvo, Porcelain and Groucha. Niecenephews Bix, Beph, Jordano, Salada (the family "slut"), Uha, Digby and Pants. Cousins Bib,

Peony, Theck, Beluga, Toetoe (a *great* plumber) , Calico and Thubb. Plus assorted in-laws and shit.

Last year's theme.

And for the first time as a member in good standing from out of the shadows! now that my dear wife Cora has gone to her, ahem, reward: my longtime mistress Actress Irene Forrest. (Had to sneak her in as "maid"- until this year.)

Not present: grandson Upto, whose dad last month shot my least favorite daughter, Eff, along with siblings Wug, Seabase, Buzzbo and Floonce. Upto, off at med school (the Univ. of Oslo), is to be excused for "avoiding family" this yuletide, but he did send his best: "Have one on me." We will, Upto, we will.

"Meltzer," by the by, is Middle Norwegian for *consumer and ingester of bottled lager or pilsner product* we didn't ask for it, none of us did. It is simply our Heritage, however these things happen, and precedes us, so to speak. (Did you know that 'Clinton' is Olde English for *he who farts in theatres during the wet season*?) Okay!!

Okay: the presentation of the Categories. To be followed, in short order or long, by Research and Report. We Meltzers don't just drink our beer we live it. Or try to. (To the best of our 'bilities.) Zane, Ju-Boy and Thubb of this year's Categories Committee--they've been at this for weeks have got the list for us. Okay, fellas, present 'em.

This year's theme.

Presented:

1. Beer for watching sports.

We get this every year, it's gotten old. At least this time Fuffy has brought along his cache of sumo tapes. "Akebono versus Wakanohana, Kyushu Basho *honey* of a match." Swell. So grab a couple 6-packs, take Sess and Porcelain out to the tool shed. (TV does not belong in a house.)

2. Beer for cooking.

That's a new one; any takers? How 'bout Aphida (formerly married to James Beard)? Uha (enrolled at the Food Inst. of Del Mar)? Great, great... here's a 6 of Negro Modelo... see what youse two can dish up.

3. Beer for family fun.

Whatever in hell *that* is. Hey, I'm only the patriarch here. Nobody wants to tackle this? Goodlet's drop it.

4. Beer for driving.

A natural. We'll all try our hand at it in due time, I reckon.

5. Beer for sobriety.

Talk about fads! A good idea tho: weed out those beers so bad you won't wanna drink 'em. A battery of Cousins led by Beluga quickly determines NONE APPLY.

6. Beer for reading.

"Me me me!" shout LuAnne and Vulvo, who disappear into upstairs bedrooms with *War and Peace*, *The Soft Machine* and sixers of Chihuahua and Superior.

7. Beer for writing.

Anyone for prose? Poetry? Pants swaggers forward, chugs a Dos Equis, tosses off a free-associational gem:

Corn hops malt barley rice wheat sand molasses buttermilk blood bran flan
flying down to Rio

Rio by the sea-o;

in my hand is an axe

and I axe you once, twice:

"Who is Doggy Julian?"

Excellent!

8. Beer for cardmaking.

Make that beer *and* cardmakingbeer theme Xmas cardsand let's give it to little Johann, still too young to personally partake of the stuff (our cutoff age this year is 7-1/2).

9. Beer for ideas.

I'll take that myself. A slug, two slugsthree four fiveof Noche Bueno and I'm set...here 'tis. The solution to all the world's ills, the first big giant step anyway, is to limit all TV commercials to a thousand dollars total production expensestrictly enforced. So nobody can sell you nothing you don't want, don't need, and "consumption" would not seem in and of itself so appealing. Nothing, not Cadillac, not Nike, not Diet Coke, would look any better than dogpoop at 4 a.m. on UHF"Buy or rent a multipurpose folding ladder"or the Home Shopping Network. A thousand bucks including actors, script, camera work, transportation, everything. It's a felony if you go over (9 yrs. in federal pen).

10. Beer for beer sake.

Aka beer for drinking. Perhaps the most important of Categories. So important that we record all pertinent activitiesthe comparison tests, the Research, the analyzations and testimonialsdialogue a la Meltzfor multiple days if nec. ("the 7 days of Xmas"or as long as the beer holds out). To be made available to bonafide beer societies FREE OF CHARGE. Beer inquiry at its very best. Leave it to the Meltzers.

To the sofa by the tree! Get those camcorders rollin'! Let's drink!!

DOS EQUIS, DOS EQUIS SPECIAL LAGER

OSCO: Having had a Dos Equis Special Lager and a regular in not too many minutes, I feel like they both must go down pretty easy.

PLUZ: Actually, though, they've gotten to be almost the same beer. I remember that when I was first drinking Dos Equis it used to be a *bitter, dark beer*. And there wasn't any of this pale lager stuff. And now they're almost the same, I don't even know why they have them in a brown and a green bottlethey're the same beer now.

O: Fuck 'em.

CORONA

O: Corona is smooth, as always.

P: Well, it's consistent these days. 'Cause I remember when Corona was first imported, you could get good Corona and bad Corona. Now they make so much of it it's all mediocre Corona. Corona is Mexican Budweiser.

O: I think if you drink Corona after something else, like the way there's something maybe, well, not exactly caustic about the taste even though it's smooth, you don't pick that up when you're drinking it after something else. 'Cause you already have an approximation of that taste in your mouth from the other beers.

P: The alleged "piss" taste.

O: So it's like a very smooth follow-up to heavier Mexican beers.

P: Not that Dos Equis is really heavy anymore.

CARTA BLANCA

P: I find it so far the most *satisfying* we've had.

O: It has its own being, its own essence. It has a kind of low-key light kind of sensibility that isn't vis-a-vis anything else, it's unto itself.

P: It's a fullness, and it has a little point at the end of the taste, a kind of very quick finish, a quick decay.

O: It has a sweetness that doesn't make you sick. I mean compared to any of the lightish beers in the world, it's one of the good ones.

P: Yeah. It's one I will *often* order in a restaurant when I just want, y'know, I don't wanna be surprised, I just want solid beer.

Jackson Browne: Carta Blanca fan.

O: In 1972, I was in L.A. to write a story on Jackson Browne for *Rolling Stone*, and I ended up at Lucy's El Adobe with him and Warren Zevon, and they ordered Carta Blancas and I ordered a Dos Equis. And they looked at me funny "Why don't you try one of these?" No thanks. And I was just happy I could pronounce *Dos Equis* and order it, y'know, but "Oh, you'll be sorry."

P: When the Damned first came to Los Angeles *Slash* wrote about them, they went up to their hotel room and interviewed them. And it was very properly transliterated so that you got, like they're sitting in bed drinking beers and Kickboy is talking to them and Dave Vanian or somebody says, "Oh, that, that DOSS ECKWISS that's proper piss." And from then on I've always thought of "proper piss" when I've thought of Dos Equis, because I never knew whether in an English context that meant the beer was good or bad.

TECATE/CAN

P: Unlike some people, I really do think the aluminum version of Tecate is better than the old steel version, which had that acridness, although there was a nice solidity to the can that made it almost seem like putting the lime on top was a good idea, but to me that was just an attempt to disguise the fact that the beer really tasted crappy. And I think they must've changed the beer too, because this beer is *not bad*.

O: It doesn't taste as corrosive.

P: No, and that's what comes from the can, I think, to a large extent.

O: Aluminum is supposed to be one of the causes of Alzheimer's, so why not get it from beer?

P: I feel I'm getting all kinds of different things from beer and grateful for them.

TECATE/BOTTLE

O: Tecate in the bottle tastes more intense.

P: Intense is relative. I think it tastes sudsier in the bottle, and smoother. I think I could drink more of it.

O: When I say the bottle seems more intense, there's something nonmetallically intense that doesn't seem to be a function of suds, but the liquid itself seems to have more bite to it, somehow.

P: See, I get the exact opposite impression. I get more bite from the canned version, and just a more pleasant aftertaste from the bottle.

O: Well, okay, here's what I would say: that Tecate in the can has aftertaste as primary taste. I mean you're already tasting *something* unwelcome immediately.

P: And then it hangs on. But you get more complexity from the bottled version. Probably because it's not masked by the, uhnow I can't remember which one I had first.

O: When I say more intense, I think it functions as beer without any of the taste shit in the way of its beerness.

P: It has more body.

O: Okay.

P: Just like a *blow* to the body from a medium-range puncher with short arms. If he can get close enough to you that he can make you feel it.

O: Rocky Marciano with the bottle, Rocky Graziano with the can.

BOHEMIA

P: I think Bohemia is a damn good finishing beer, because it cuts through, it has an edge, it has a little bitterness, it has substantial body. I've sometimes ordered it with a meal, but it's wasted on a meal, really. Bohemia is good for like a small cup of something, because it has a lot of variety, complexity, bite and stuff like that. It's good for one bottle by itself, I don't think you should buy a six-pack of Bohemia. I think you should drink it one bottle at a time. That's not to say it's better or worse as a utilitarian beer Carta Blanca is better. With a meal of medium to large size, I would say don't go to a second bottle of Bohemia. As a matter of fact, I would say Carta Blanca or Corona for your first beer while you're eating, and as a second beer after you're just about through have a Bohemia to round things out.

*"Maybe they should bring back
the piss. Only kidding."*

SOL

JORDANO: There's a kind of lemony afterburst, or afterburpafterbirth? And today it's clear, but not always. I've sometimes had it and found it to have universes of debris in it. Or at least *solar* systems.

THECK: Well, isn't the sun the source of all matter?

J: There are other puns I guess, but who's got time? I'd say as a beer it's okay, a B-minus. Could be a lot better, and also a lot worse. It doesn't stack up against Dos Equis, which has a fuller taste, but they brew this too, so I guess they have a different clientele in mind. I know beeroholics who swear by it. It does seem less toxic than it used to be, or used to seem.

T: To me it's a better lightish beer than a lot of 'em. I'm observing this while we're drinking it by itself, though. I don't know how it would fare in a head-to-head with Corona, say, or Carta Blanca.

J: What I'd like to see is a list of ingredients. You know the biggest lobby currently in Washington is the one whose job it is to keep ingredients off the beer labels. They've done a pretty good job, wouldn't you say? Imagine if ice cream or canned mushroom soup were exempt from having to list it.

T: I think it tastes a little leathery, y'know somewhere towards the back of the mouth.

J: You mean like a shoe?

T: No, lighter than that. Like a tan car coat, say, as opposed to a black or a brown motorcycle jacket. And if it's shoes, more like soft deerskin. Or a glove. I wonder if it's any of the same chemicals as tanning.

CORONA LIGHT

WOONA (sips, spits out): Junk. Ugh. Absolute junk.

E.Z.: How is it junk?

W: Awful. Junk *is* awful. Terrible. It's lingering on my tongue.

E: But what's the actual taste?

W: I don't know. A total waste. Is that what beer tastes like?

E: How does it smell?

W: I can't even smell it. It has no smell.

E: Unc, what would you say?

Unc (sniffing Can't drink. He's got the Parkinson's): No! No! (He cries uncontrollably.)

CORONA (12 OZ.), CORONITA (7 OZ.)

VULVO: Well, they both *look* the same.

GROUCHA: Smell the same.

V: Same fast-dispersing head.

G: But do they taste the same?

V: They sort of do, but do they do?

G: They continue to, but as I continue drinking from the glass they seem to now look different in the bottle. Although it could just be the amount of blue in the label of the larger one, the Corona, makes the beer look darker.

V: And you know? Corona really seems to taste less delicious and delightful than it used to taste.

G: A more noticeable bitter element?

V: Biting as opposed to a bite?

G: Maybe they should bring back the piss. Only kidding.

V: Oh, it's finewhat the hey.

NEXT MORNING, WARM

V: Great, just great.

G: Goes down easy easy easy.

V: The elixir of the gods, as it were.

TECATE LIGHT

BIX: It sort of has nothing.

BIB: Tastes like good American bad beer.

BIX: It tastes less like beer than any other light beer I've had, including Coors Light.

BIB: You know, this is actually the first light beer I've had. Whenever I see "low calorie," "no cholesterol," "light," I'm like Goebbels when he hears the word "culture" I reach for my gun, I run in the opposite direction. So this is my first experience, and it's certainly not as good as Heineken, which isn't the worst thing, probably, to not be.

BEPH: I don't think it's completely terrible for light beer, but it's one of those it just tastes like a generic, modern, synthetic, imitation beer. They should call it imitation beer food.

BIB: Beerlike beverage.

BEPH: Beer with plastic overtones in the aftertaste.

BIX: The aftertaste of it is not beerlike.

BEPH: Exactly. And the head is a total giveaway, right, that it's gonna be one of those fake beers. 'Cause it's got billions of very uniform-sized, tiny, y'know, like injected bubbles. Not like bubbles that occur naturally in real beer.

BIX: You wouldn't wanna call it suds.

SALADA: It tastes like flat beer. From the bottle, already flat. Got some salt? (Adds salt.) Now that's a head. (Drinks.) Tastes like *salty* flat beer! Like if you're at the beach, in the ocean, and it gets in the can. But it would have to be sitting out there a long time first to get this flat.

PACIFICO CLARO

BIB: I think it's, well, okay I don't know if it's light, I don't know if it's unlight, I have no idea but it's not as bad as Tecate Light. Should it be?

BIX: How could it be? (Shows him label.)

BIB: So I was right it's a decent beer.

BEPH: The bubbles are not *all* the same size, so this is probably in the vat for a week and not a day. (Drinks.) *That's* beer I could drink that. It's, well, it's very thin. It's *almost* beer. A sincere attempt at a Heineken or a Becks style beer that's only okay it's drinkable. It would be moderately thirst-quenching. It's not

offensive. And I do like the label, the little red mountain and the lightning bolt with the anchor. I assume these are beer ingredients behind the life preserver. I'm not sure what the origin. A German sailor might've been involved with the company a long time ago.

NEGRO MODELO

DIGBY: The first sip tastes like a dark beer. Now it just tastes like beer. It isn't that dark.

ZANE: They call it dark ale.

D: It isn't anything like a dark ale. It's a pretty light dark beer.

LUANNE: It evaporates faster than most dark beers. The taste doesn't linger, doesn't have the heaviness or the lingering flavorness of dark. It has a little bit of bite to start with, and then the flavor just evaporates you forget about it.

Z: Yeah. Having sipped it for the last half-hour, from one moment to the next I can't remember it. It passes very quickly, like a marijuana time-distortion thing. Where'd it go?

L: I get the impression that you wouldn't *intentionally* choose to stay with it through time, you'd just move on to the next kind of beer...something you could build a relationship with.

Z: You could drink it by the shot.

L: The shot would be good. In terms of head, though, it's a typical dark beer. It's Guinness-like in the quick disappearance of head.

D: On second thought, it tastes like tomato juice.

UHA & APHIDA'S NEGRO MODELO BLACK BEAN SOUP

1/2 lb. black beans, soaked overnight

4 tbs. olive oil

1/3 cup chopped red onion

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped

4 or 5 Italian plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped

2 or 3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tsp. ground cumin

1 tsp. pasilla chili powder

1/4-1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper

1 bottle Negro Modelo

2 qts. water or chicken stock

2 tbs. minced cilantro

salt to taste

Saute onions, jalapeno pepper and garlic for a minute or two in oil. Add chili powder, cumin and cayenne, and saute for another few seconds (don't burn spices). Add tomatoes and mash them into the mixture. Cook another minute or two. Add beer and stock and bring to a boil. Drain beans and add them to pot. Add 1 tbs. of cilantro (reserve other tbs. for garnish). Cook at a low boil for as long as it takes for beans to get tender. Time will vary from 1-1/2 to 3 hours depending on the beans. Remove 1 cup of tender beans and run them through a food processor together with some liquid from the pot. Return the puree to pot and blend (this gives some body to the soup). Taste for seasoning (don't add salt until end of cooking process or beans will be tough). Garnish with cilantro and more red onion, tomato and/or avocado if desired. Serves 4-6.

PACIFICO CLARO, CARTA BLANCA

RICHARD (myself): You seem to prefer Pacifico Claro to Carta Blanca. Why is that?

ACTRESS IRENE FORREST: I have a feeling that it was a predetermined prejudice. First of all, it has a better label, it's got yellow and red it's nice. It feels more foreign, it looks more exotic. And look at the curvature of the bottle. Everything about it is more appealing. But I don't *mind* Carta Blanca, I don't mind it at all. I think it's just ordinary 'cause I have it all the time. Can I tell you the truth? I forget what they both taste like. Let me taste the Pacifico again...mmm. It's very satisfying. It has that good wheaty taste. Or peaty I think

they call it. Let me taste the other one...I still prefer Pacifico. It has a much more pungent smack. Carta Blanca is fine. If push came to shove, I could drink either. You know what. ...mmm...the Carta Blanca's sweeter. I tend to like sweet, but I'd still go with Pacifico it's more tangy. The truth is, I get very affected by beer, so after a while it doesn't matter what they taste like. That's a side of beer, don't you think, how it affects you? If your body can respond to it without too much trouble, I think that's quite good.

BOTH BEERS MIXED IN ONE GLASS

I: It's not a good idea to mix them, you never know what the chemical reaction of one beer on the other might be. But drinking the mixture this time seems fine. It's not as good as each beer singly. It does dilute the taste. But it is okay. And the fizzy effect of burpy, or some would call it belching I was just thinking, because *I* don't make those horrible sounds, but I do have that sense of it coming back up through my throat. That's one of the things I like about beer, is when you're sitting there and then it comes back, and you get to have it again without drinking it. I also like the smell of beer when you throw it out in the sink perhaps you fell asleep and you didn't finish the bottle, so in the morning you throw it down the drain.

CHIHUAHUA VS. CARTA BLANCA

I: I like the Chihuahua better, which you would never imagine, liking a beer named Chihuahua. I don't like scrawny little silly, stupid dogs particularly. I don't know if they're stupid, but they're not appealing. But I like it, it actually seems to have a little more bite to it as a dog should, haa little more flair.

R: I think they're almost indistinguishable. Chihuahua is less sweet. There's a little more sweetness to the Carta Blanca.

I: You know what? I was passing by and I *smelled* the Chihuahua and it gave me a very good feeling. Carta Blanca doesn't have as pungent a smell. I'll taste it again...you know something? Now the Carta Blanca is having more of a ting or something.

R: A tang?

I: A tingle. So I guess once you've had enough of each it doesn't matter. I wish we were drinking wine instead of beer.

BOHEMIA VS. TECATE

I: Bohemia looks darker, Tecate looks greener. But that might be because there's a colored napkin behind it. I'll taste the Bohemia...yum yum...it's excellent. Tecate...well...the Tecate is sweeter. Bohemia is more bitter.

R: I just think Tecate tastes like wishy washy beer. Bohemia just has more *range* of taste.

I: Let me taste them both again...okay. The Bohemia is beer, the Tecate is nothing. It's just very light, it's good enough but it's not really beer. It's like a light tea, a beer tea. You put water in the leaves and then you get kind of a hint of the flavor...that's what this is. It's watery.

R: And Bohemia is like coffee?

I: Bohemia has a pungent, more of, it's good, it's stronger.

R: Have you had too much to drink?

I: Well, isn't that the way to ascertain if beer is any good? The buzz, right? I think the buzz comes from the Bohemia, not the Tecate.

MODELO ESPECIAL VS. TECATE

R: Which looks darker to you?

I: Modelo Especial. I like to say it. With a name like that, it must be special. By the way, who's going to wash all the glasses? 'Cause I won't do it. As opposed to drinking out of paper cups. Okay, I'll taste each one...mmm...yes. Unfortunately, you can never, it's not fair. Because I drank the Modelo Especial first, and I think your first taste of beer if you haven't had beer in many hours is always better. It's always the best taste. And I tasted the Tecate second, and it tasted second best.

R: Here's what you do: rinse your mouth with...

I: No, it's not a question of rinsing. It's a question of the enjoyment of, no, I've already been polluted. And I like it better anyway. I think it's a much more full taste, and I was drinking it like a thirsty tree. Y'know, a tree that's thirsty for liquid.

R: Why don't you drink some Tecate with the *approximate* thirst to see how you feel about it?

I: Okay...it's too thin. It doesn't have as thick a taste. I do like a thicker beer.

R: Why don't you just stir some honey in with it?

I: No, you drink it as it comes.

R: How is drinking Tecate after eating Pizza? Is it good with food?

I: It's excellent. I must say one thing for beer, whether it's Tecate or another beer or what. It quenches your thirst. Which is a good thing to have as a property for a drink. And the Tecate, I think 'cause it's thin, does quench your thirst very well.

R: There's no such thing as a thick beer.

I: Yes there is. If you took a poll you'd see.

R: To me these beers are almost identical. There's a little more *body* to the Modelo, but by body I don't mean it's thicker, I mean it's got more structure to it.

I: There's more weight to it.

R: Well, whatever you wanna say.

I: I think there's more difference between Modelo and Tecate than between Bohemia and Tecate. Those, they're more subtle. These I think are very much different.

R: I disagree. I think Bohemia is very much different from Tecate, and Modelo is *not* very different.

I: What makes *you* an authority?

R: So why do you think there's more difference here?

I: They *taste* different. I would say Modelo is a *tasty* beer which Tecate is not. It has a very satisfying taste, in fact I would like some more...mmm. I don't know how to describe it, but it's more smooth without being inconsequential. Possibly it's the best Mexican beer.

R: I would compare 'em to different whiskeys. Modelo is a single-malt Scotch, Tecate is blended Scotch.

BLINDFOLD TEST

I: Well, I was sure the first was Tecate, so obviously the other would have to be Modelo. But when I tasted it, the supposed Modelo, I couldn't tell at all which was which. They tasted exactly the same, no, maybe the second one *was* Modelo. Because it did have a bit of a tangier taste, but maybe it activated the pepper from the pizza.

R: So why'd you think the first was Tecate?

I: When I drank it, it went down without much ceremony. It didn't make a big deal on the way down the way some beers, they have more of a hello taste. And the first beer did not say hello. The second did, but not as much as I thought it might. I'm not saying I overrated it, but the difference is more subtle than one would have expected from my initial response.

R: Well, Irene, the first was Tecate, the second Modelounless I confused them.

I: No, I think that's correct. But it's not as much of a difference as one would have thought.

BOHEMIA VS. MODELO ESPECIAL

I: Well, I'm not much of a connoisseur, but the second one is better.

R: The second one is better? Usually you tell me the first one is better.

I: You must've switched it.

R: No I didn't. The first is Bohemia and the second is Modelo.

I: I won't necessarily call it better, but it's a sharper taste.

R: First you said it was better, now it's only sharper?

I: Well, just in terms of the excitement factor. I'm saying there was definitely a resounding result.

R: Resounding *result*?

I: I mean there was like a bite. It did stuff to you. Just tastewise, whereas the other one was bland.

R: I like the Bohemia better. I think it's got a more, uh, complete range of taste, an *organized* medley of taste, whereas the Modelo seems like about two or three different tastes in different directions.

I: Well, the directions don't bother me.

R: The Modelo does taste good, but it's sort of more like an American beerlike Miller or something, Ballantine, y'know, an East Coast beer. Schmidt's. Rheingold.

I: No, I think it's much more, uh, I wanna say it's got more of an edge than those beers. It's more, it's like they tried harder or something.

R: I think somebody dropped a rubber band in, it tastes like a rubber band.

I: Oh gosh, Richard, if that was the way beer tastes no one would drink beer.

BLINDFOLD #2

I: That's the Modelo.

R: Why do you think so?

I: Well, to tell you the truth I really don't know, but it just felt like it was special.

R: Well, Irene, it was the Bohemia.

I: That's fine. I don't feel too disappointed that I was wrong.

R: So the Bohemia itself is also special?

I: Yes. This just proves my theory. That the more you drink, the less able you're able to discern.

R: Less able you're able?

I: Less able to discern the difference, because there was a *profound* difference at the beginning, and now maybe, maybe not.

R (serving her Modelo): Now which one is this?

I: This is the Especial.

R: Why would you say that?

I: It does taste a bit tarty.

R: Tarty?

I: Tartier. Not tardierlaterbut tarter. More tart.

R: Like a styptic pencil?

I: No. Do you know that candy called Sweetarts?

R: Taste like that?

I: No, but it's a good concept.

BOTH BEERS MIXED

I: Now I see the difference. That must be the Special.

R: It's both of them mixed in the same glass.

I: Oh, no wonder. Okay.

R: Is that what makes it special? If you mix the two of them, you get the best of both?

I: Um...if you mix the two of them, it doesn't matter. No, yeah sure, whatever you say.

DOS EQUIS VS. DOS EQUIS SPECIAL LAGER...

I (sampling Dos Equis Special Lager): I like it fine, but for taste and bite it's ordinary.

R (serving her Dos Equis): Try this.

I: This has the more dramatic taste. It's a little bit more, it's less smooth if you want to call it that, it's more bittermore sour.

R: I don't know if I'd call it more sour, but it's more bitter. And the Special Lager *is* kind of ordinary. How would you compare each of these to your favorite, Modelo?

I: Probably Modelo is better.

R: How is it better?

I: Unfortunately for me, whichever comes first is the better one.

R: But you had it *last night*. That still counts as first?

I: Yeah. I mean I somehow, for some unexplicable reason, set that as the one, the standard.

R: So Dos Equis is not as good as Modelo. What about Dos Equis Special Lager? It's dishwater?

I: No, it's fine, there's nothing wrong with it. I wouldn't say it's crummy.

R: Is it better than Tecate?

I: Probably Tecate is better. It has a nicer sound to it.

R: So in other words you're saying you don't know what Dos Equis Special Lager is better *than*, but you're saying it's fine.

I: I'm saying it's fine. It's not terrible. I have no memory for beer. If this were chocolate, I could tell you. I don't know if you wanna know this, Richard, but none of these beers compare to English beers.

R: But how 'bout compared to U.S. beers?

I: Probably they're better than U.S. beers. All of them are. But I suspect with beers it has more to do with what you were doing than what you were drinking at the time that makes it memorable. Like, is it a special evening?

R: Excuse me, Irene. First you tell me that Modelo is memorable. Now you're telling me...

I: I don't remember the *taste* of it I just suspect that it's better than these. Just from the idea of it.

R: What's the idea of Modelo?

I: It just was exciting. I'd never heard of it before. It's based on that. Can I tell you the truth, Richard? If you wanna get down to it, there's really just two kinds of Mexican beers. There's the kind that tastes a little bit more bitter, a little more hearty. And then there's the kind that goes down more easily and has less taste. And they all seem to belong to one of the two categories. And of these two, the Dos Equis is more bitter, and the Dos Equis Special Lager is the easier one.

...VS. CARTA BLANCA

I: You know something, I think *this* is the best one. Unfortunately. 'Cause it's just an ordinary beer. I mean you see it around all the time. And I've had more to drink, so I don't know if...

R: Compare it to the Dos Equis Special Lager.

I: No need. The Special Lager is just nothing. It has much less of a bite, though I wouldn't quite call it *bland*. But you know what? Before we go on, I just must tell you that this is THREE GLASSES that have to be washed tonight! As opposed to two, which I could accept.

R: Okay, compare the Carta Blanca to Dos Equis regular.

I: Mmm...very good...Carta Blanca's the best. I would stand behind Carta Blanca. It's the first one that's given me any sense of, you know, where I have *conviction* about it. Its taste is very good it's round. It's got a very round combination of tart and sweet. But I just feel compelled to comment on the ludicrousness of putting words to an experience that's purely sensual or sensorial or nourishment that's only, or biological satiation and to put...y'know, part of this is just stupid. To have to put detailed kind of poetry and analytical descriptions to something that's *primal* is in a way a distraction.

R: So would you sit around sipping Carta Blanca all afternoon?

I: Okay, that's a more valid question. Of these three, I guess I would pick Carta Blanca.

R: You'd drink it all afternoon?

I: Well, that would be nice.

R: And how about Modelo?

I: I don't remember Modelo. I just remember that I liked it.

R: So you've now put it completely out of your mind. And half an hour ago you told me Modelo was the best.


I: But I didn't *remember* it when I said that.

R: Nor do you prob'ly remember you said Carta Blanca was ordinary.

I: Did I say that? Well this time it's just wonderful.

...And to all a good night.

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[from ♦A Certified Good ♦un, Y♦Know?♦, by Richard Meltzer, *Creem*, January 1977]

Back in July or August of nineteen hunnert sevendee Ronnie Finkelstein of Circus Mag told me there was this dynamite broad working at Scribner♦s Bookstore in NYC who was givin people free books all the time and takin outa the cash register and one of the books she was givin was my harder♦n-hell-to-read (never read it myself) rockbook which she was even reading. Told me she looked like Keith Richards so I couldn♦t miss her. Had this dentist around the corner from the joint so one cavity drilling afternoon I paid the honey a visit (she stole me *Ball Four* and *Only the Ball Was White* and showed me the cover on some New Directions paperback by Blaise Cendrars--long cigarette ash danglin down--who I later appropriated as a pseudonym) and we hit it off so good she wrote the date down in her notebook and we useta

celebrate the anniversary (can't remember the date myself cause I'm only good at years and seasons) by having bloody marys at the El Quijote next door to the Chelsea. Never slipped her the pork--just friends!--but she once gave me a pubic hair that I still got mounted somewhere.

Got to hear all these great stories that she ain't tellin anymore like how the rats ate her birth certificate on the bad side of the tracks in Chicago and how her aunt so-and-so once spent a hot nite with Hank Williams in Chattanooga where she was then claimin she (Patti) was born and how her real father was a Philadelphia gangster and how her mother had an affair with racetrack announcer Fred Caposella and how her father-father told her the fax-o-life by sayin "The erect male penis is put into the female vagina and you only do that when you're in love" so when the first guy offered it to her she told him she didn't love him so he axed her if he if he could eat her so she said she'd hafta ask daddy who told her "Forget it" and how her brother (now a butcher) who looked like Paul Newman useta be a transvestite. Dylan never told Nat Hentoff a better batcha tall tales & true. Anyway so time marches on and the annivs stopped getting celebrated and now ('76) she don't even return my calls anymore and last time I talked to her in the flesh she was already turnin her attention somewhere else before I was halfway thru my second sentence but that's cool cause she's a star so she's entitled (really mean that--no foolin--only hurts the littlest littlebit).

Anyway so there really ain't no way I'm gonna be anything but thrilled to my shorthairs by a Patti LP and this one's no exception. Altho the last one was a bit less grave cause y'know her live show (still--when it's on--the best by a cunny since Billie Holiday and best by either gonad group since James Morrison's prime) has its moments of excruciating gravity but it's also got her laffing it up and spitting on the stage. Like the title cut's great and tense and all that but it could've extracted a wee bit more from the lesson of the Fugs' "Virgin Forest" (y'know like even the first experiment in self-conscious homogeneous length hadda yield to the inevitability of self-parody and stuff like that) cause like you can't do "Goin' Home"--"Sister Ray"--"The End" forever cause after a while it just kinda bristles with more than a morsel of, uh, datedness per se. Less Velvets in evidence than last time tho but in its stead you got Patti paying abundant vocal homage to currently faddish punkdom (wake of the Velvets anyway) which is okay for the band to indulge in but why waste your pipes straining for functionless punk poses that make you force your notes thru all sortsa dumb strainers like George Foreman tryin to punch in a straight line? Like this sweetie was already vocally past punk forever by '74 (Buffalo State concert that spring she was down on her knees wailing the neo-blues--as only she's been able to wail em--for Patti Hearst and hitting the lost chords of a note without breakin into a

sweat) and by the winter of 75 she was so far ahead of all other femmesingers in the orchestration-of-it-all that almost anything with an intense easy-croon feel for any kinda cosmos sounded like it could very well've been somethin Pat just dashed off (first 12 or so times I heard Rhiannon I thought it was her--FM stations in LA usually don't burden you with data like who did it). Singing on side one of this one sounds like too much needless struggle.

But that's mostly just nitpickin cause Ain't It Strange is an improvement on Miracles at its own game (great Chicken Hirsch drummin!) and Pissing in a River now gives her two entire weewee songs (Piss Factory on the Mer label was the other) altho maybe she oughta try ending her orgasm with urination some time cause so far it's only been the beginning and Pumping is as rewardingly hot & desperate as trash pulp sex circa 58 and Distant Fingers is Third Stone from the Sun as told by the stone (as well as a nifty play on Pearlman-Roeser's ETI--Allen Lanier's co-authorship presumably supplying the topical incestuous excess) so it's really a bonafide certified good'un, y'know?

Richard Meltzer *Maple Leaf Cowpoop Round-Up*

Diane (Like) Leigh (many) is (Canadian) no (entertainers,) stranger (Maurice) to (Bolyer) country (is) music. (a) For (Maritimer) five (from) years (Woodstock,) she (New) was (Brunswick.) featured (He) on (is) the (a) C.T.V. (highly) show (talented) "Country (entertainer) Music (on) Hall." (many) In (stringed) 1965, (instruments,) 66, (especially) 67, (the) 68 (banjo.) and (His) 69 (outstanding) she (abilities) was (with) voted (the) Top (banjo) Female (have) Country (won) Vocalist. (him) She (the) has (title) had (of) numerous (King) songs (Of) on (The) the (Banjo.) country (He) charts, (is) has (a) appeared (member) at (of) the (The) famed (Tommy) Gold (Hunter) Nugget (Show) in (where) Las (he) Vegas (is) and (often) the (called) famous (upon) "WWVA (for) Jamboree" (a) in (solo) Wheeling, (number) West (due) Virginia. (to) Her (viewers) latest (response.) release (Maurice) on (is) the (also) Quality (an) label, (outstanding) "Devil (exponent) To (of) Angel," (honky) is (tonk) quickly (piano.) climbing (Colin) the (Butler) charts (is) for (only) this (11) "Cinderella" (years) of (old) country (and) music. (shows) For (great) thirty (promise) years (as) Gordie (a) Tapp (country) has (music) been (star.) entertaining (He) country (started) fans (singing) all (at) across (age) Canada (5) and (in) the (Sudbury) U.S.A. (during) Star (a) of (matinee) several (with) of (Terry) his (Roberts.) own (He) Canadian (has) T.V. (appeared) shows, (all) he (across) is (Canada) now (and) a (in) star (parts) and (of) writer (the) for (U.S.,) the (receiving) very (strong) popular (audience) "Hee (response.) Haw" (He) show. (will) Comedian, (have) songwriter, (his) singer (first) and (LP) instrumentalist, (release) Gordie (on) is (the) Mr. (Paragon) Versatility (label) of (this) Country (May.) Music. (Give) A (a) personable, (listen) fun-loving (and) man, (you'll) Gordie (agree) has (that) established (Colin) himself (Butler) as (is) a (destined) top (to) performer (become) in (one) the (of) entertainment (Canada's) world. (brightest) Rodeo (country) recording (music) artist (stars.) June (Bud) Elkard (Roberts) proudly (is) holds (the) the (man) title (with) of (the) Canada's (big) First (voice) Lady (from) Of (Moncton,) The (N.B.) Fiddle. (who) Her (has) ability (such) with (a) the (terrific) fiddle (way) has (with) won (truck-driver's) her (songs.) many (His) awards (first) and (big) admiration (hit) from (was) her ("Alcan fellow (Run.") fiddlers. (Since) She (his) has (first) composed (L.P.) many (of) fiddle (the) tunes (same) that (name) can (he) be (has) heard (joined) on (the) her (fast-growing) three (ranks) LP's (of) on (the) the (hit-makers) Rodeo (on) label. (the) Truly (Boot) a (label.) lady (That) in (Bud's) every (rich,) sense (clear) of (voice) the (was) word, (made) June (for) is (recording) a (is) credit (in) to (full) Canadian (evidence) fiddling (on) and (his) the (latest) country (Boot) music (release,) scene. ("This) Shirley (is) Field (Bud) was (Roberts.") born (Brown-eyed) in (five) Armstrong, (foot) British (Norma) Columbia. (Gale) She (comes) has (from) two (Moncton,) albums (New) on (Brunswick.) the (At) Rodeo (the) label (age) with (of) the (20) first (she) one (moved) containing (to) six (Montreal) yodeling (where) songs. (she) In (began) 1948 (her) she (career) was (on) given (radio) the (and) title (T.V.) of (Johnny) "Canada's (Burke) Sweetheart." (also) She (hails) has (from) won (New) numerous (Brunswick.) awards (Both) for (Johnny) her (and) songwriting, (Norma) singing (currently) and (reside) yodeling. (in) Shirley (Toronto) and (and) her (are) husband (regular) Bill (members) French (of) have (the) just (Caribou) released (Club) their (TV) first (Show.) duet (Jimmy) l.p. (Arthur) on (Ordge) Vintage (is) label (a) #SCV-115 (country) entitled (singer) "Together." (from) Bill's (the) own (city) exceptional (of)

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Best Of

Wild and Crazy S.O.B

Gave up on the family thing.

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[June 15, 2000](#)

Fatherhood

Feature Stories



Richard Meltzer with his sister and father. He assured me (as often as not) that I was the most important being in his life.

Perhaps it's a question of semantics, who knows, but I feel incredibly relieved to be done with "family," "home" — these are things you grow up to leave and be done with, at least as much as school. To claim, as some would, that select human add-ons after the split — a lover or a spouse, say, or bosom buddies, sidekicks, or semi-regular drinking companions (and you'll notice I'm not mentioning offspring) — constitute not only family, but a "purer" version of family based on choice and real need, and that we "all" need family in some configuration...I see such assertion as wordplay, I see it as the fucking BUNK.

The first member of my family, my original, actual family, the one I was born into — my so-called “blood” scene — I was able to dispense with was my father: dear old Dad. It was impossible, it was frighteningly easy, it was all variety of arcane, jagged, stress-filled whatever, but I did it — though of course I haven’t really dispensed with him at all. I’ve never been able to really talk this out, not by the numbers, let me see if I can ‘splain it now...

My father is dead, he died, but way before that he sort of died, became something quitelike dead, for many intents and purposes, so palpably you could just about put a date on it: two dyings, and which should we count? (At 80 and 40.) And there’s maybe even a third dying, a child-size giving up in a major way, when he was five, but I wasn’t there to see it. We’ve only got his word for it, and it’s hard these days to take anything he said literally, any more than wine red seas or looking glass ties, or even seriously (more than a speech by Clinton or Reagan).

Who was he? What was he? I haven’t a fucking clue.

As I find myself reconstructing things, by the time I was four (and my sister was one) it was clear to my parents that they each lacked the energy, the stamina, the basic wherewithal to deal whole-hog (for more than minutes at a time) with two children. One had been plenty, two was a terrible blunder — whudda ya do? The plan from then on was for my mother (with an assist from *her* mother, who lived with us) to handle my sister, “raise” her, all of that, and my father to handle me. We would all be together, more or less, at mealtime and Christmas and on family outings, but that was it.

My sister, it would turn out, was the lucky one. For me, what the setup meant was the old man had full, unrestricted license to own, operate, supervise, to some degree nurture, but above all manipulate me, lead me by a ring through my goddam nose, and crowd me to the point of suffocation. For the next six-seven years, he wouldn’t fucking leave me alone.

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Of course he LOVED me (and I loved him) and all such biz — but that part was maybe the worst of it. A sentimental slob, a ‘40s romantic in desperate need of a compliant LOVE OBJECT, he inflicted his ardor on me in direct proportion to what he wasn’t getting from his wife, assuring me (as often as not) that I was the most important being in his life. A sensitive little prick, I grieved for the guy in his loneliness, enabling him to box me in all the more. (While he wasn’t getting his quota of wifelove, I was meantime getting even less in the way of motherlove, although

years later, when I asked my sister what that had been like, she said with a smirk, “You didn’t miss much.”) Those times when his game got to be sooo heavy that I went to the old lady for help, or even a second opinion, she’d tell me what amounted to *Hey, he’s just my husband. If you’re gonna be FRIENDS with the likes of him, you’re on your own, kid.*

What I got from this not ungenerous acquaintance was, hell, he showed me how to draw and paint, well enough that I understood color and perspective by the time I was six, taught me all about dinosaurs and starfish and igneous rocks, read me stories from seminal science-fiction collections, dealt me stamps and coins and *all* my hobbies — every one until rock and roll. He also fed me more bullshit than a captive audience should have to endure.

Like he told me, without my asking, where babies came from when I was only like seven, but he also made sure I knew it was “illegal” to poke around if you weren’t married — you’d go to JAIL, he said, and for too many years I actually believed him. (Finally I realized he’d been married a virgin and didn’t want me having any more fun than he’d had himself.)

Every weekend, he took me to the movies, something I’d much rather have done with folks my own age. During the 20-block walk to and from the theater — we never took the bus — he would deliver a lecture, or a meditation or monologue. En route to *Revenge of the Creature* and *This Island Earth*, he filled me with crap about the terrible Commies (never accept an apple pie from strangers: Communists have been known to lace them with HAIR), then afterwards, as the sun went down, he hit me with a grim blend of science and sci-fi, i.d.’ing clouds, explaining the coloration, and concluding, “This is how it will look at the end of the world.” (Say what?)

Above all, he regaled me with tales of his glorious premarital past, like the time he and some pals had been to a NUDIST CAMP — what wild and crazy s.o.b.’s — and this other time (drunk!) they’d swum out to a yacht moored off Sheepshead Bay and spent the night. (How pathetic to hear this hokum — at a moment when his only friend was ME.) In the late ’30s, as “press agent” for a semi-pro football team, he allegedly phoned in “game reports” to the *Brooklyn Eagle*. Yet when we watched a game together (before instant replay) and I asked him what a draw play was, all he could say was, “Draw play? I know what a screen play is.”

A lifetime Democrat, he voted for Eisenhower over Stevenson, on the grounds that “Ike was my commanding officer” — yeah, right. In 1940, the story went, he’d joined the army to “save England from the Blitz” (as opposed, more likely, to escape the clutches of *his* unhappy pappy), only to slip on the ice at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont,

tear a cartilage in his knee, and get classified 4-F a year before Pearl. Usually the story was preamble to his long-range plan for keeping “our” military heritage alive: I would sign up for ROTC (“Better to be an officer, Dick”) when I turned 18. I was in fucking kindergarten when he first served me this scenario, and not a day went by that I didn’t cringe at the thought of growing older (subtracting from 18 to figure how many years I had left).

Though the Meltzers as a unit never participated in the rites of any organized religion (other than Postwar Capitalism), Ol’ Man Meltz — though it might’ve just been a *riff*, y’dig?, tossed off in the same manner he read me sci-fi — occasionally fed me passages from the Bible (flaming pits and all), scaring the PISS out of me, and sometimes pretended to still be a Catholic — he’d been one for seven months. In 1935, to join an Irish frat at Brooklyn College — his way of being anything but a Jew — he took vows or whatever you do, ate no meat on Fridays, went to confession — the whole number — for as long as he could keep it up. It was easier to be an Irish Catholic, he surmised, than an Irish drunk. In all the years I knew him, he’d only sip beers and *feign* being drunk — what an actor. (He also collected beer mugs.)

Yet I lived to tell it. As so-called fate would have it, the weight of the whole thing proved too much for the old fuckeroo to continue to bear. When I was ten or eleven, the charade began to unravel. First to go were our trips to the movies. Maybe it was *Creature with the Atom Brain*, maybe *The Creeping Unknown* — something broke the camel’s back. One weekend he announced, flat out, that he’d had enough of the shitty flicks we’d been going to — “half baked” was his term — and if I wished to see any more such trash, he wouldn’t be along for the ride. Huh whuh? — fuck you — as if this silly dance was MY idea! At first I felt betrayed...then a feeling of RELIEF set in.

In short order, he threw in the towel on father-son, on family altogether. Though for all appearances he went on behaving pretty much as he had, it was minus the constancy, fervor, commitment. From an imitation of life he moved to an imitation (and a weak one at that) of an imitation. The baggage of parenting, always a wretched cartoon, is more than *any* adult human, especially in postwar America, should have had to abide (a crack habit seems easier to finesse), and my father (what’s the word, lame? a loser? a dork?) was not made for it nohow.

In his labor-intensive — but ultimately finite — run with me, he lacked the killer instinct, strategic foresight, and parental finishing touch to be truly dangerous. If he’d known what he was doing, I’d’ve become a serial rapist (or a commodities broker) when the dam finally broke. (Call *me* lucky.)

Soon after giving up on the family thing, he gave up, in just as big a way, on Life Itself, even if, in his overachieving whitecollar mode, he probably passed to colleagues as animate for quite a while. No, he didn't give up striving — or even bullshitting — just *caring*.

But with the pressure thus off, and decades to spare, he would still never become someone I (or anyone) could exactly “talk to” — he never mastered smalltalk or became approximately Real. Which today feels sort of tragic — or something — but that's the fucking breaks.

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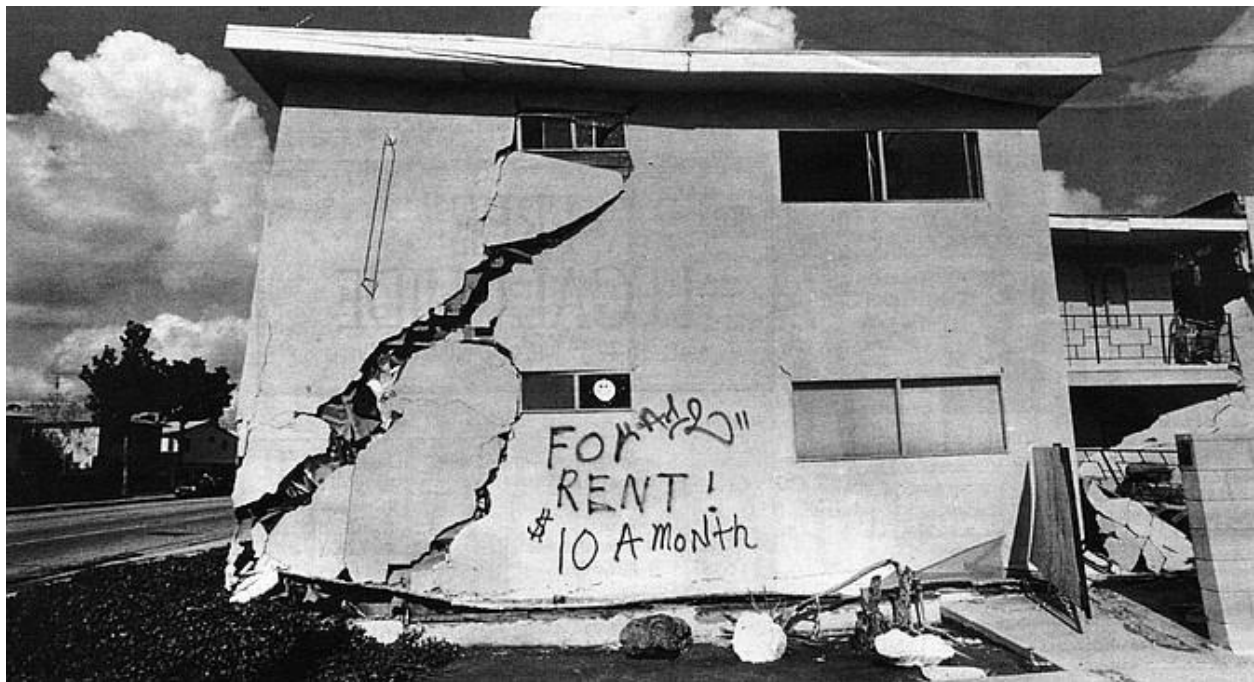
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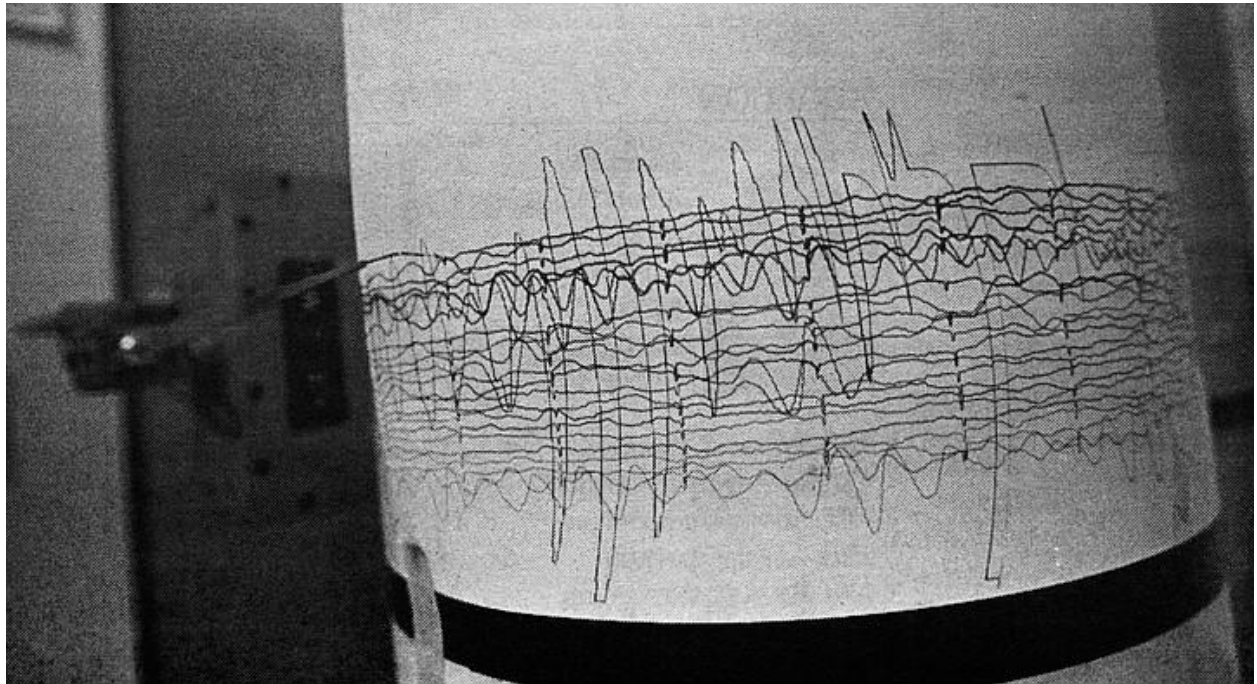
June 30, 1994

Music scene



Earthquake aftermath, Sherman Oaks

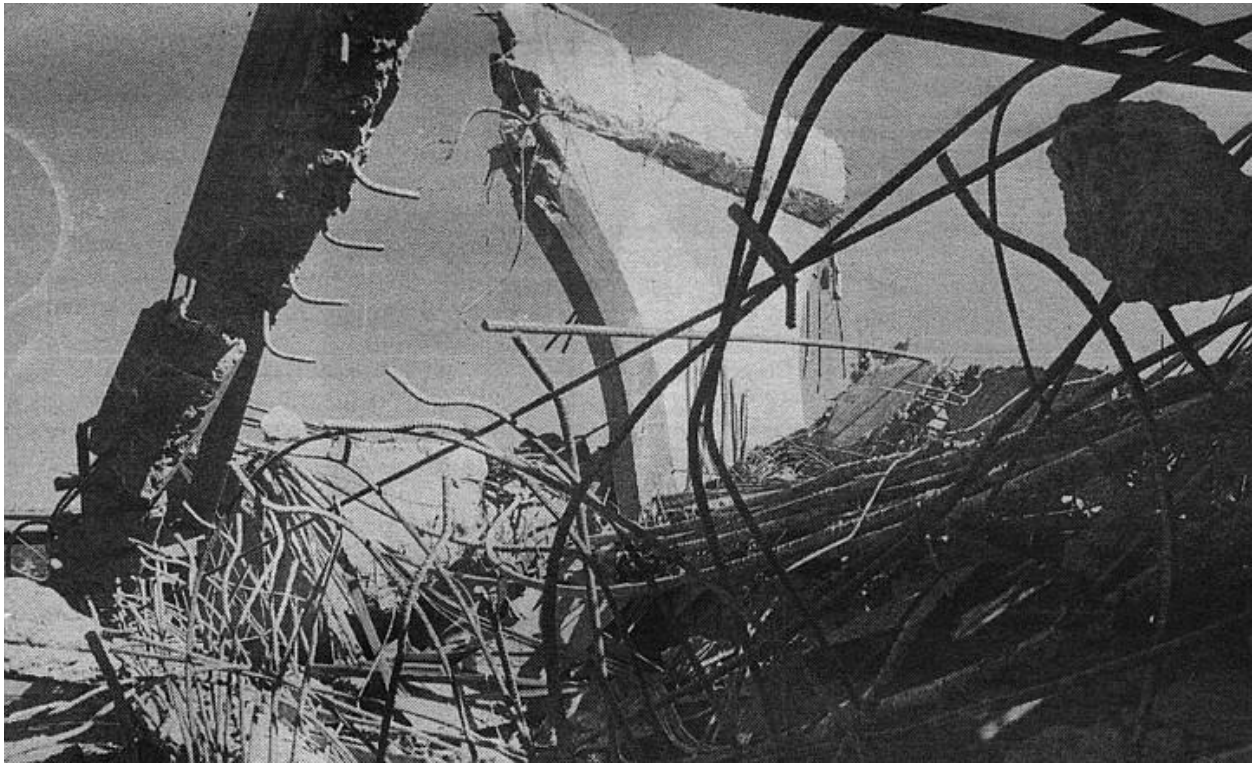
Getting rid of records, right, because of the goddamn quake. Like bricks, dead albums fall heavy. They fell and they fell — hard — and in five months of aftershocks have fallen some more. Less hard but still. Bricks I have too — I use them as bookends, as paperweights — and they fell, hard, loud and heavy, if not nearly as far. Less high on shelves, and less of 'em. I have THREE THOUSAND jazz albums, man, at least a thousand rock albs, and who knows how many hundreds of blues, reggae, R&B, folk, comedy, novelty, whatnot. Whew.



Dead I say because they're fucking obsolete. I hardly play any anymore. Don't think I've listened to 30 in the last year. When I'm sitting writing I can't be bothered with in and out of sleeves, dust 'em, 20-minute sides, get up, turn 'em over, change and care for 'em.



Much as I try to evade such inevitabilities, like any other schmuck I'm a creature in the end of topical hands historically dealt. Easy chases out less easy. And although no audiophile snob, or audiophile anything, I admit the pops and cracks of long-loved vinyl bother me; the warps. Though my equipment is nowhere good enough to allow me to encounter/experience the true glorious wonderfulness of CD sound (if such biz be not mere hype but true), original digital recordings so far *sound okay to me*.



Then I think of all my poor records — how angry do you want me to be? I amass this massive stack — a collection, more than a collection, almost a library (people come over just to hear stuff; mags call me with “fact check” questions) — many many many of which will never be issued on CD I would bet my pud. Easy decommissioning less easy, they’ve become soundless bric-a-brac. Do they still even make styluses?



I pick 'em off the floor, restack 'em, shelf upon shelf, left to right, A to Z. Some cover damage but no breakage, thank heck I'm not 20 years older and they're 78s. But what an empty chore, what an everlasting gig — it dawns on me — like I'm saving/preserving dusty, crumbly museum pieces. Feeling like a Flying Wallenda (speaking of all-fall-down), I flash on that line from their penultimate crackup: *ich kann nicht mehr halten*. One Wallenda tells the others he can't hold it no more — just prior to dropping them — and I can't keep this up much longer myself. If I can imagine having nothing — move the epicenter a dozen miles and we're talking Nothing — I can live with less of Something, a lot less something, easy. But dropping to this less rather than *that* less could be one tough slide. (Better keep a ladder and a net.)

Some choices are snaps. Any LPI haven't played in 13 years, or played only once, back when I first got it, or that surprises me to see now still around at all. Like the Niels-Henning Orsted Pederson Quartet, *Dancing on the Tables*, an import on Steeplechase, with Dave Liebman, John Scofield, Billy Hart. Did I even play it once? The guy's a passable first-unit European bass player, no Oscar Pettiford but what the hey, kind of at times an old-fashioned joke compared to contempo Euros like, for ex., Peter Kowald and Maarten Altena, but he'll do. He's on ten billion albums, behind everybody from Bud Powell to Lee Konitz to Anthony Braxton, he's consistent, dependable, blah blah blah, but I picked this up (used) only because it featured him as leader. Which is no reason in even the laziest of times to keep something — spinning once and forgetting — and no reason nohow now.

Or the eponymous *Codona* — Don Cherry, Collin Walcott, Nana Vasconcelos — on ECM. Sitar (Walcott) in a front-line jazz setting? C'mon. This one I don't think I even got through the first listen, and kept it only 'cause it's long been my wont to be a Don Cherry completist — hey, he worked with Ornette Coleman, played some *great* seminal trumpet in the late '50s, early to mid '60s — a luxury I can no longer afford so fuck it, g'bye, G'bye too to Don's mid-'70s *Hear and Now* on Atlantic (annoying neo-fusionish bullcrap) and *Brown Rice* on A&M/Hori-zon (ditto and worse). And speaking of Ornette-derived completisms, Charlie Haden's *Folk Song* (with Jan Garbarek and Egberto Gismonti, on ECM), g'bye to that too. And *Exploring the Scene* by "The Poll Winners" — Barney Kessel, Ray Brown, and Shelly Manne — on Ornette's original label, Contemporary, which I've saved unplayed for the last 11 years on one pretext only: a tepid run-through of Ornette's "The Blessing" (along with "So What," "The Duke," "Doodlin'," etc.) cut in August '60 — possibly the earliest recording of an Ornette tune by somebody else: 'bye.

Other “affiliations” that can go: *Double, Double You* by Kenny Wheeler (played straight man a couple times for Braxton, but his sound, his tone, has always made my skin crawl); *Expansions* by McCoy Tyner (so what if he turned cartwheels with John Coltrane, ‘s no way I feel like hearing him *this* week with Hubert Laws and Gary Bartz); *Night Music* by Woody Shaw (who recorded with Eric Dolphy a year before Eric died, and thought of himself — even if it rarely showed — as Coltrane-influenced, but other-wise/even so...keep it).

There’re some people I was never a completist for, or if I was I didn’t mean to be, like Stan Getz — nobody needs 24 Stan Getz albums. Especially post-bossa nova trash on Columbia — *Another World*; ‘80s repackage *The Lyrical Stan Getz* — and RCA — *A Song After Sundown*, with Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops. Or okay, Horace Silver, 17 albums, fine, but 19? So I jettison Silver yn Wood, featuring “The Tranquilizer Suite,” and *That Healin Feelin*, the one with him in a turban, nice cover — but he’s also on electric piano, and oh those vocals (*ulp*) by Andy Bey.

Speaking of which, vocal albs I’ve saved just for the backup musicians: Helyne Stewart, *Love Moods* (Contemporary), with Teddy Edwards, Art Pepper, Jack Sheldon, Frank Rosolino (pleasant but really no big deal); Vi Velasco, *Cantando Bossa Nova (Means Singing the Bossa Nova)* (Colpix), with Zoot Sims (she’s Filipino, looks something like Connie Francis, sings bossa nova versions of “I Got Rhythm” and “Cheek to Cheek”); Sandi Shoe-make, *Slowly* (Discovery), with Tommy Flanagan (worst vocal version ever of Charlie Parker’s “Yardbird Suite,” and that’s including the *famous* bad one — with Parker himself — by Earl Coleman). I hardly break a sweat parting with these.

Sponsored

Accone; no, a narrow isosceles triangle, rotated so its vertex is pointed at 196... 5. It’s pointed at ‘65 and possibly ‘64 but pointed *from* (and *in*) ‘66, where it. I. She. Whom I needn’t specify—first or second love — it doesn’t matter. Stick-figure knee bent.

Down. From standing you’re sitting. Kneeling. Knees buckle under me. The violence of the shock, the shock of the admission, have canceled my underpinning. She is “seeing” her dance teacher — “taken up” with — it doesn’t matter. Bottom. Fall down all Downfall. Twenty-one years until knepeat. Till the next kneetime. Jolts-to-come and jolts come, many shapes and sizes, but no bends, measurable and involuntary, till the first aftershock to the first earthquake big enough, I don’t remember how big, numerically — not a big one — I had the hap to experience in vivo; intense enough to make the wood not only creak but *smell*, the beams, the foundation being rattled,

battled, everything held up by old failing timber — a toothpick in the wind. And ever since.

But then. That quake like this one I was in bed. Woke me. No time to get up under, whatever they tell you, a doorjamb. Car alarms off in the street. The TV moved two inches. Paint chips on the floor. Particles settling in the walls. An hour later, another one. My knees shook — slackened — what they held shook; I hadda sit down. I'd been on boats before, I'd lurched, rocked — this was totally different. The sea supports you — they call it "buoyancy" — but not (I now knew) land: solid was no longer solid, and terra firma something less than firm.

And every time since. For weeks after a quake every tremor, every little baby rumble — every time a truck goes by — I feel in my hinges this is It Again. The bigger It tho, it for Real: this time it's *all coming down*. On these hinges hang the limits of my courage on earth — this slaying planet — nothing not killed by it — but it's not death fear we're talking, or dying fear, or rather: nothing is *added* in the process to my rocksteady awe of annihilation, to an already metastatic dread of lousy endings.

'Cause if you want death fear, I could show you some death fears — A-bombs, polio — how about tetanus? — and all they've ever done is freeze the hinges. The flaps. Immobilized, I couldn't stand even as a prelude to falling. Rigored without the mortis. This seismic baloney leaves room for collapse — flaps oiled — fold — like a ton of potatoes. But greater than potatoes or meat is the weight of a troublesome image, and I ain't talking beams on my skull in the bath, a cantilever or two thru my thorax.

Which occurs to me, yeah, you bet, and yeah it's unnerving, but the vividder aftermath, from where I stand-and-fall, is not me in rubble but — there's a lotta butts in this section — all my goddamn contingent *things*; not my own death or dismemberment but the tenuous safety of my discs, my books, my favored flannel shirts, the strew and spew of all my damn *hobbies*. My precious junk with no roof or walls to protect it. The awful burden of property come home to roost.

The time, the time, who's got the time? Too many objects of the round plastic variety demand special CONSIDERATION, won't let me part with them before at least one final listen — "just to be sure" — no weed-out without a spin....

Stephane Grappelli, *I Remember Django* (with Barney Kessel) and *Young Django* (with Philip Catherine and Larry Coryell). Never my favorite violinist, and I've got 98 percent of everything he ever did with Django Reinhardt anyway — who needs simulations? — so I play 'em... not much... begone!

Elvin Jones, *The Ultimate* (with Joe Farrell and Jimmy Garrison). In the years he was with Coltrane, Elvin took the p.o.v. of jazz drumming a full half-step beyond Philly Joe Jones and kept it there, but since Trane his playing has never been the same. Not to these ears anyway, not on this one.

Tomasz Stanko Quintet, *Music for K*, on a Polish label (Muza) with a flimsy black-and-white cover. Don't remember anything about this, let's see...quasi- (or pseudo-) free playing by trumpet, alto, tenor w/bass and drums, sort of an alternate Art Ensemble of Chicago using Count Basie horn sonorities (and licks)...I'll live without.

Flip Phillips, *Phillips' Head*. Bass clarinet — ho hum — theme from *Love Story*...go 'way.

Earle Spencer and His Orchestra, *The Almost Forgotten Pioneer of Modern Big Band Jazz*, issued by the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors. Art Pepper's on here, Lucky Thompson, Jimmy Knepper too, but the full band SINGS verses to "Oh! You Beautiful Doll" — yowch — cancel the almost in Freeway overpass this household.

Now this should be fun: Hampton Hawes. Starting with 18 LPs — most of which I found in bargain bins after reading his autobio, *Raise Up Off Me*, a good one, although good books, good stories, ain't good playing, though actually he did play oke, oke enough, even if it tended to be a little florid and prechoreographed — I weed (in a week) down to four. Yay.

Basie: I get rid of 26 (from 63 to 37). Albums backing up singers (Tony Bennett, Kay Starr, Billy Eckstine, Sinatra, the Mills Brothers), a James Bond tribute, almost everything from the late years on Pablo. But I save (for perversity sake) *Basie on the Beatles*, with notes by Ringo.

Not too many people at this point are exempt from weed-down: Ornette, Parker, Dolphy, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Lester Young, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, and — or so I thought — Duke Ellington. But the Duke's session with Teresa Brewer, *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing*, screams for review. I was an Ellington completist, I'm still an Ellington completist — got 118 by him — and this is one of his last studio recordings (Sept. 4/73), but I don't EVER again wanna hear Teresa sing "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good"...pshaw!

Formerly exempt: Dizzy Gillespie. Drop a sad needle on *The Melody Lingers On*, a piece of shit from '66 — covers of "Winchester Cathedral," "Cherry, Cherry,"

"Cherish," "Bang! Bang!" and such generic perennials as "Tequila" and "Portuguese Washerwoman" ...the fucking nerve.

Three more Don Cherrys with a tad too much fartin' around "Eastern" style, main offender being *Organic Music*, a two-record set with vintage psychedelic art (swans and elephants holding flowers, boys and girls with third eyes living in harmony with their geodesic dome) and 16 tons of drone-y pap...unlistenable.

Nine Mai Waldrons since '70 can go go GO: ponderous monotonous; if I hadn't seen him live once with Philly Joe I'd never've acquired these.

Four by Sonny Rollins on Milestone, in their own right as big an embarrassment as the Dizzy LP. He doesn't even "have a way" with unlikely standards anymore, no more irony, likewise no more "great literalism," just dreck: "Dancing in the Dark," "I'll String Along with You," "I'm Old Fashioned" — painful.

Then I come across these, um, what to call 'em: documents of human pathos (Jazz Division). Never the basis of, or occasion for, anything exactly akin to sonic experience, just weary objects kept (and kept!) lest the bloody bleeping world scream and cry. Spotlight on:

Bobby Timmons, *Little Barefoot Soul*, his first album on Prestige after leaving Riverside. The notes talk about how only Bobby and bassist Sam Jones showed up for this '64 session (a quintet date!), phone calls all over town finally got 'em, Ray Lucas on drums — pretty uninteresting fare, coulda been called *Little Shallow Soul* (cover is a quasi-pretty hair-straightened black woman sitting in picnic grass) — saved it all these years for the sheer, yes yes yes, poignancy of the operation. Does anybody else still own a copy of this? You want it, you can have it. (Bobby died of alcoholism in the mid '70s.)

Roger "Ram" Ramirez, *Lover Man* (French RCA). One of three hyphenates credited with authorship of "Lover Man," here he's featured in trio settings with guys like George Duvivier, Oliver Jackson, Ed Shaughnessy. Got it cheap (accidentally marked \$3.98 although an import) but I've only played it once until now — just a pale gamut of colorless pianisms — sorry, Ram, this is adieu.

George M'lely, *The Soloist*. Ugly cover, not bad but not especially distinctive. Half a step up from a vanity pressing (on Alternatives in American Music, an Albany label with a P.O. box), and one cut, "Village Scene (Greenwich 1961)," suggests he's been at it for ages.. .boo hoo, hate to be mean, but so long, sailor.

Ich kann nicht mehr halten, and likewise *nicht mehr* carry all this matter on my back. To the next place, wherever the hell that is. Slimming down my load in prep for Finally leaving this gigglepit. I don't wanna die here, but that's hardly it: I don't wanna live here. Eighteen years in one crummy town is bad enough; 18 in L.A. has been like 81 in Alphaville. I know, I know: I've said it before. This time I swear it. I've had enough.

What clinched it — natch — was local broadcast coverage of the thing. For all of us not dead, maimed, or homeless, this 6.8er was dubbed a “loud, rude wake-up call.” By the numbers were listed all the standard familiar right moves to make in preparation for “next time” (and the ongoing unending after-math of this time) — stockpile plenty of water, flashlights (w/spare batteries), a good, sturdy pair of shoes, stay away from power lines, under doorjamb, turn off the gas, etc. — everything but eat your spinach — but no mention was made of road maps or airline schedules OUT OF HERE — none! Not one “newsperson” even *suggested* making plans to move. (Imagine the impact on property values if people “prematurely” started selling; on the 100-plus-year-old Pyramid Scheme that is L.A.) Seismologist Kate Hutton came on to tell us, well, this freeway collapsed, that one lost so many off-ramps, some other one severely buckled, but it didn't happen to *all* of them, mind you, so freeways are (dig this)...safe! Crowd control as per usual... *self* control (the town that knows How!).. .ho-fucking-hum. Oh, does this place love to lie to itself!

Shoot — I've wanted out for at least 15 years, but as fate would have it I'm involved with — addicted to — someone who likes it here, or if “like” is too strong a word she works here (and is addicted to *it*). An actress. The “real” kind they don't even want here, don't write parts for — an open sore at a cocktail party. When she's turned down for the parts they do write I tell her, “You should be grateful Hell doesn't want you,” but she scoffs. Now even she wants out, but it's tenuous. The longer we go since the last tremor, the closer we are to the next — right? — but to her it means a longer-forgotten sensation of terror. (There are days she wants to stay and be rejected.) Her beat and battered apartment building — there's a big *bulge* in one outer wall — meantime seems just one more significant aftershock away from being condemned, if not collapsing.

Fuggit. All this talk about the “Big One,” our long-overdue 8.0 on the San Andreas, is so much diversionary claptrap. When every address in town has its own personal “minor fault” right under it, ready to rock with, oh, only a 5- or 6-point-something temblor, L.A. is the world's biggest eggshell waiting to crack. At least it's most massively populated. ...And crack.

Yes! They can happen anywhere! In St. Louis or Dover, Delaware. But they WILL happen here. So drop the bullshit. What sort of immoral slime allowed (encouraged!) construction/expansion/migration to continue (accelerate!) following the 1931 Long Beach quake (speaking of wake-up calls), inviting new rubes to live here and die, or their children and/or grandchildren die, and/or lose all instantaneous/forever? Read *City of Quartz* for the answer.

Meantime: aftershock reports on TV are getting more skittish, more I-want-my-mommy, as time rumbles on...’s getting harder for the monsters to lie (in real time) with a straight monster face.

Once a week I load my car with heaps of vinyl, drive to a 20-minute-distant record store and unload. The wonders of purgation: every unload feels like six months of shit expelled. So far I’ve parted with 700 jazz LPs, and the store guy’s comments always make for good two-way barbershop conversation.

How can I part with *Dixieland Jam* by the Eddie Condon All-Stars, he wonders in earnest. Vic Dickenson plays trombone on only half the cuts, I tell him, not mentioning also that I really can’t stand Eddie (one of his faves) and bought it in the first place only for Vic. Haven’t I listened, he asks, really listened, to Tom Harrell’s *Stories*? Okay, I say, he’s a diagnosed schizophrenic (and the cover shows him as a disembodied face in shadow), but his playing is so conventional — fine as such but so what. Why’d I ever buy the British reissue of *I’ve Got You Under My Skin* by Georgie Auld with Jud Conlon’s Rhythmaires? Well, it wasn’t for the cover (’50s-type dame with big tits, what looks like a suede blouse, attempted sleaze but it’s all too straight, flowers at her neck—she vaguely resembles Joan Crawford), and I haven’t played it in so long I don’t remember anything except that I didn’t like it, so my best guess is I got it after seeing Georgie at Donte’s and my gal Louise coerced me into buying it on a trip to Tower where I’d otherwise have gotten away with buying nothing.

I’m not even selling this garbage — I’m trading. For CDs of stuff I love and/or need — can’t imagine living w/out — which by virtue of their format should outlive (as potentially non-silent matter) the demise of the turntable and stylus. (Until the next forcible format change.) The good news/bad news is the conversion rate: 15 to 1 approx., LP to disc; what a sap I feel (though I certainly never intended this as an investment). Even hobbies, insofar as they’re perpetually feasible, are frigging pyramid schemes. (But less matter is less matter.)

I check the racks and find individual CDs of Eric Dolphy’s *Outward Bound* and *Out to Lunch*, Warne Marsh’s *A Ballad Album*, 3-CD sets of Basie, *The Complete Decca*

Recordings, and Ellington, *The Blanton-Webster Band*, and have them order *The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* (10 CDs), Thelonious Monk — *The Complete Riverside Recordings* (15), and John Coltrane — *The Prestige Recordings* (16) — that should eat up the rest of my credit slip.

Every day, lest I lose the momentum to get the hell out of here (to Austin? Portland? Albuquerque?), I make a point of reminding myself, not just intellectually but sensorially, of WHAT IT FELT LIKE, four-something in the morning, whatever time it was, the moment it hit. No movie, and that includes *Earthquake*, with the possible exception of *The Two Jakes*, has ever gotten the sound of it right. When I moved from New York I thought earthquakes would sound like moving subway cars. They sound like whatever space you're in being played like a drum. My apartment drum began as loud this time as any I'd heard and got louder, and louder. And faster. And faster. It didn't seem possible the sticks could play any faster without breaking, either themselves or the various drum heads — walls, ceiling, floor — so my assumption was they all were breaking by the second. I could also hear all kinds of stuff toppling, falling, but without a light (power went out instantly) I couldn't gauge what or how much. Meanwhile there was this crazy bang-bang vertical thrust to it which I'd never felt in any previous quake. When I stood up to get under something I felt lifted; every step was like something at a funhouse, wherever my feet made contact the floor seemed to have lumps. (Later I would discover the water glass beside my bed to be empty, though it hadn't tipped over.)

I realized this was by far the largest whatsis I'd experienced and simultaneously thought, *Oh shit — there goes today's writing at least*. When I thought to get my flashlight from the spot I always kept it, it had moved. I tripped over I knew not what en route to the only light in the place — the pilot on my gas heater (my stove has electric ignition), which to what avail I wasn't sure (there being 12 units in my building, and a boom from one would no doubt be a boom to all) I shut off. Failing again to find the flashlight, all the while fighting the urge to go back to sleep, at least till sunup, I (or the Boy Scout in me) tripped a couple more times, put on my glasses, the shirt and pants I'd worn the night before, a jacket, tried in vain to get into a pair of leather-soled shoes with buckles, which was just as well since (it worked out) I'd be walking, managed to get into a pair of track shoes, and stumbled into walls on my way to the street.

Somehow remembering where I'd last parked my car, I groped through the trunk in total black (though some claim stars were as visible as in the country, I didn't see many, and there wasn't much moon) for a flashlight I'd never before had occasion to use and beamed it at nearby structures — nothing had collapsed. I walked a block north to the semi-major thoroughfare I'd be taking if I drove — without overhead

illumination, open trenches from sewer work made things look hairy, if not in fact impassable — and too tired to mess with it, I walked on. Flicking the light every so often to avoid tripping over garbage cans, I passed a mile and a half of shattered storefront windows before turning off to Louise's place.

Where I met and greeted her shock, dread, relief at seeing me, but no immediately discernible damage, no yet-discernible anything (it would be 17 hours before neighborhood power would be restored). The first thing I heard on her battery-powered radio was a report from the Valley where, in addition to fires, some news bozo had encountered "extensive damage to water mains and water coolers" — say what? So stiff an upper professional lip, or so California frozen cool, that the effort it took to speak at all vanquished any and all subsidiary effort to posit a thought while so doing: fuck this place. (Boy oh boy do I want out.)

Paring down my rock stash has thus far proven more difficult. The problem is, what's currently there is the *result* of multiple pare-downs. It's the one subset of my collection I've always periodically sought to reduce. Used to get promos of this junk, right, and my policy has always been *when in doubt, dump*. Still, some long-treasured titles do now scream, "Dump me already!" — so I will....

The Move, their first alb on Regal Zonophone, never released in the states; later they mutated into (among other things) ELO. Saved basically for one cut, "Fire Brigade," with its big ironic Duane Eddy riff, and for the fact that my sister got it for me in England in '68 — I was still interested in British Invasion oddities, even late B.I. — which isn't enough for me to hold onto it another 25 years.

Ditto, the first LP by Pink Floyd, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, which I actually gave the first U.S. review (in *Crawdaddy*; "Purpal Doodee" was my title) but haven't played once since 1969 or '70.

Nico, *Chelsea Girl*. Jackson Browne wrote a couple of the tunes and plays on them, and I used to go see them play at the Dom, spring '67, when Jackson cut a great demo for Elektra (I still have a cassette of it), stronger and more interesting times 50 than the rest of what he would later record put together, but I've never really cared for Nico (any more than for late Jackson), in or out of the Velvet Underground.

Suburban Lawns. Late-'70s L.A. punk with the not-half-bad Su Tissue (who ended up in Jonathan Demme films), but the prospect of occasionally hearing her only fully decent cut, "Unable" ("I...can't...bag-a your love"), does not motivate me to retain all 12 inches in perpetuity, let alone play it now.

D.O.A., *Triumph of the Ignoroids*. Kept mainly for its use of the famous “snatch photo” of Maggie Trudeau (to go with the cut “Rich Bitch”), that and the guitarist’s great name, Joe Shithead.

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark. Ditto, name.

Max’s Kansas City 1976. Nothing on here ever meant anything to me except the Pere Ubu cut, “Final Solution,” and that mostly because Peter Laughner (whom I used to correspond with — what a grim fuck — and Lester Bangs wrote an obit for) plays on and possibly cowrote it: “I don’t need a drug/I need a final solution” — indeed.

Love It to Death. Kept, long unplayed, the only Alice Cooper album I’ve ever owned, only for the obscure “Ballad of Dwight Frye,” not (ot not especially for the once-famous “I’m Eighteen.”

Golden Hits of the Shangri-Las. Purchased back when I was writing what became *The Aesthetics of Rock*, in which they garnered a couple-three pages of over-attention. I’ll miss it (but not that much).

And then there’s some I’d actually love to abandon — they’re just taking up space — but as I handle ‘em they demand a listen, just one cut, half a cut, hook me anew, and I’m stuck with them, possibly for eternity: “Chihuahua” by Bow Wow Wow (on the *See Jungle! See Jungle!* album), “Carnal” by the Passage (on *Pin-drop*), “White Sport Coat” by Marty Robbins (on an otherwise worthless two-record anthology), and so many more, why even list ‘em (I’m such a bourgeois simp).

And in what possible eternity — or plausible old age — will I ever sit and play 3 percent of all this crap?

Los Angeles magazine cover story: “200 Reasons Not to Leave L.A.” — what insidious tripe. What they oughta now be selling, advising, even the crowd controllers: proceed — slowly — to the prospect of leaving (relocation loans available: let the flicking developers, planning commissions and freeway contractors underwrite it); if you stay, don’t use a freeway or a mall; wear helmets to theaters if you must see *Schindler’s List* (speaking of holocausts); spread the word.

Aside from which, it’s already over. On an average non-cloudy weekday afternoon, you’d have to look and look (and wait and wait) to spot three tour buses at the Farmer’s Market. The F.M. post office, once a teeming polyglot squirm for postcard postage, has no lines anymore. Outsiders evidently know something residents don’t — or do and deny. After the insurrection, the so-called riots, of ‘92, sojourning out-

of-town rats were still jumping on this sinking ship...well, no more. Whatever the draw ever was — “glamour”? a wall-to-wall “natural beauty”? The conspicuous, rancid display of “wealth”? — the spit that held *that* storyboard together is going, going, soon to be g-g-gone.

A projection: one more *non*-big one sufficient to disrupt filmmaking for even a week, to contribute substantially, for instance, to travel time (and hence expense) to shooting locations, to spook into departure enough resident beings whose faces and bodies familiarly appear in its product — not to mention its backers, makers, “creators” — and the film industry will as one, not piece by piece, studio by studio, project by project (as has been the case for years now anyway), pack up and leave for some Arizona or Carolina of the mind and/or map — gone, finis, end of routine. At which point this town without pity, minus its principal source of fascination and allure, and without the machinery to lead its remaining minions by the nose to not only topical x but to (and through) the very DANCE of being led, and is thus no longer even competent to lie to itself, stands revealed as the depressed, and depressing, wasteland it long has truly been, becomes at last an *official* dead city like (let’s say) Detroit.

In any event, money leaves (if not people) and it becomes Mexico City — and I don’t mean ethnically — as this parched strip of shit slowly but surely reverts to geologic, geographic type: first surface glitz (the “beauty”), then basic living conditions (water, power, sanitation, drivable roads — after one subway disaster scotches *that* anti-solution). Just WAIT till local symptomatic relief is deemed *not* a priority by the state, the feds, and the who-shall-live-and-who-shall-die’ers tell a decidedly unglamorous L.A., just as Ford once told New York, to drop dead. End of pyramid.

New sounds in my building. Its stresses and balance points have changed. Often there’s this tick-tick-tick, ominous though less like a bomb than a bug or a muted woodpecker, sometimes in a window frame, sometimes in the walls. And the buses and garbage trucks keep passing, jostling things and racing my heart like a poorly tuned ’65 Mustang, and even when they don’t: reminders. Vibrations you can’t even feel have an impact. Like the bubble-over of a geologic unconsciousness, this hooley loosens bulbs in their sockets — they begin to flicker, you check the fixtures, the wiring, finally you just tighten ’em. If only I could tighten the 40-watt bulb which illumines my life: a bag of sand ripe to run gut-open thru the cracks in the floor.

I don’t leave home these days, not even around the corner for a sandwich, without a satchel containing: flashlight, glasses, contact lens cleaning and wetting solution, floppy disc copies of everything I’m currently working on.

Not once since that morning in January have I had four hours' continuous sleep.

Nor have I turned the gas heater back on (some nights have been *cold*).

Portland? This week it looks like Portland. I've never minded rain.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer on Liszt, Wagner, Verdi

Chump change touchstone of nothing

Author

Richard Meltzer

Publish Date

Dec. 21, 1995

Classical Music

Feature Stories



Astride a chariot backstage, Luciano Pavarotti awaits his entrance in *Aida*'s grand march (1981)

Liszt, *Les Preludes*, New York Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Bernstein, Sony SMK 47572

Wagner, *Der Fliegende Hollander*, with Simon Estes, Lisbeth Balslev, Math Salminen, Robert Schunk, Bayreuther Festspiele, conducted by Woldemar Nelsson, Phillips 416 399-2

Verdi, *Aida*, with Maria Callas, Richard Tucker, Fedora Barbieri, Tito Gobbi, Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala di Milano, conducted by Tullio Serafin, EMI CDCC 7 49030 2

Two approaches.

One.

Six-seven years ago, taking notes for a piece I was planning on why I wasn't a parent, I jotted down the following:

To recall fondly their own childhood as a trigger for generating kids of their own verges on the oxymoronic: viewing a time when they knew better, when their unbridled intellect and imagination ruled the world, viewing it well after (and from the context/vantage point of) having had it all beat out of them: absurdly believing they will not beat it out of their own potential offspring, and not simply because they believe they are not beaters, but because in having been beat they have also lost their elemental smarts, their purity of perception (not to mention any genuine, operative, more than ad hoc compassion): losses which preclude their leaving another's purity/etc. intact even if they were God.

To be socialized at all is to have been beat out of much: ironically the principal much they now so tenaciously cleave to.

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The dynamics of which still ring true to me, basically, though my own romance with the part that's been beat is pretty much gone in the ether. I feel no great gush anymore for the "purity" — for my own or anyone's — real or hypothetical. Squalor is more like it. I say FUCK my childhood (all our childhoods). What a chump-change touchstone of nothing.

Childhood as magic? No. Childhood is belief in magic. A bigger diff than the diff between 4000 tulips and a pack of Luckies. (Between *War and Peace* and a pizza.)

Hey. Basically I feel like I'm somewhere in a life, certainly closer to its end than beginning, and while I have little nostalgia for the early parts (other than once in a

while, not always, for the limitless time it seemed I had left then), I do have a memory, too much memory, for such hokum; I forget nothing....

Basketball games with a trash can and my dirty socks...discovering a mound of maggots and, taking them for caterpillar eggs about to hatch, putting them in a jar with dirt and enough grass and leaves to serve as a week's caterpillar food...the time I cut my hand on a razor blade I picked up in the alley behind my house to fend off a twisted strand of cloth-covered wire I thought was a snake, my mother insisting the cut had been caused by a rusty nail though I swore and swore it hadn't (I didn't tell her it was a rusty razor blade), good thing I was up-to-date in tetanus shots...in the mirror after a fight, seeing a glob of pink gummy candy stuck to my face and believing it was a piece of my ear fallen off...thinking of Roy Rogers every time I had tuna. Gene Autry whenever it was salmon...the month I couldn't score the current issue of *Superboy*, finally finding a beat-up copy in an old drugstore where I had a burger that tasted like liver and a warm, oversweet Coke...visiting a classmate who was drinking milk and puking on strips of cardboard...fuggit...and this was the good stuff.

And I'm not even talking 'bout the horrors of adolescence, nor does this have anything much to do with what I think of actual children, today, although, yes, I think they're entitled to NO special (moral, political, aesthetic) consideration, in fact the proper consideration — the best consideration (i.e., with respect for more than their cuteness and presumed "innocence") — is to treat them as SMALL PEOPLE. Small people who haven't had the goods beat out of them yet, or who have and, well — I already said that.

Entitled to no special treatment, but if I had one, like every other I who has one, I would of course treat the little darling as a precious prize and all such blah blah blooey: MINE: how Nazi! Or see all of'em as darling simply because I own and operate one, i.e., am a member of the parent class and all that misdirection, sick sociology—but that's another piece; I still haven't written it.

And obviously — big fucking truism — there's a child (at least one child) in everyone. We're all still, some more, some less, in daily communion with our childhood unconscious. The circuits may be askew, but old triggers remain in place, or some place. Big shit.

Anyway, anyway...this stuff makes me dizzy...let's see...something about how giving kids special status only demographically isolates them for the slimy likes of Ronald McDonald, Barney, the Little Mermaid, etc., etc. — the stuff grownups (esp. those that control the marketplace) would love to have 'em like, love, eat, piss and

shit...exploitation...the susceptibility of targeted unmolded dough...(I mean fuck, even rock and roll as such is kid music, it too was once and forever isolated to that dead-end street—kid music that has once in a blue moon GOTTEN AWAY — the ticket that exploded — though I suspect most, if not all, of its explosions are safely in the past)...hack, clear...sort through...till we come at last to the foreground of the piece, its ostensible “subject matter,” which is:

Music encountered during the miasma of childhood, of MY weary childhood, which I find I can now retrieve/recycle without (somehow) the cloying taint of that cheezy Gestalt. Stuff I can bear to listen to that I first heard then.

My favorite TV show in the early '50s was this ongoing dinnertime replay on a local NY channel of about a dozen '30s/'40s serials, half of 'em starring Buster Crabbe, with such protagonists as Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon (three separate serials), Red Barry, Don Winslow (in the Coast Guard; in the Navy), Tim Tyler, Ace Drummond. You'd get a chapter a day till they ran through each one, 12 to 14 chapters, then on to the next; repeat in sequence when finished with the lot. The best of the Flash Gordons, and the best of the whole set, was the first of that series. *Space Soldiers* (1936), which in addition to giant standing lobsters, lion-men, a flying palace kept airborne by prisoners stoking the dread Atom Furnace, and Ming (the Merciless) had snippets of the first music I ever felt compelled to call “exciting.” Two years ago I was able to i.d. the snippets as having been lifted from *Les Preludes*, the 1854 tone poem by Liszt.

Close behind was *Captain Video* (aka: *Captain Video and His Video Rangers*), which, broadcast live, had no music to punctuate the action, but it did have a great opening theme — more of that Exciting shit — 15–20 seconds of what I recently figured out was the overture to *The Flying Dutchman* (1840, revised on and off until 1860).

Not quite in the same category— not as Exciting — but still functionally, I dunno, “moving” or something, is the Triumphal March from *Aida*, which got played at assemblies by the crummy school band at P.S. 44, which I was in for about a month on clarinet (they gave us plastic reeds 'cause we went through the normal ones too quick). We also played, or tried to play, the phony spiritual from Dvorak's *New World Symphony* and something called *March Marionette* (not Gounod's *Funeral March of the Marionette*) by I've got no idea who. Only the march from *Aida* stuck with me.

From snippet to whole cloth, microcosm to macrocosm....

Les Preludes is 17 minutes of mostly filler, lots of lulls. The “exciting part” doesn’t come till about 2:30 or so, suddenly it wells up and THERE IT IS — as “gratuitous” an occurrence, a payoff for the wait, as in the serial itself. Not as staccato as I remember, heck (‘cause staccato would be better); is this Leonard Bernstein’s fault? Wait — the second appearance of the theme (at 15:30) is much more percussive, bombastic, so maybe this is the one they used.

Flying Dutchman, heard now, the whole opera, not just the overture, I can get into right away, it’s “infectious,” accessible, a piece of cake.

It’s conceivable I could’ve ridden with it for a few minutes at a stretch, even then (although much of both music and text is about gonads and madness, which probably would’ve been as beyond me as *Duel in the Sun* had been when I saw it at five or six with nothing to prep me but TV Westerns); the *Steuermann, lass die Wacht!* routine in the third act would’ve made me sweat no more than a typical number for chorus from a ’50s Broadway musical. Anyway, now, there’s enough quick-turnover tension/release from beginning to end to make the whole thing as emotionally easy as falling off a log.

Aida is a different story, the march is way in the middle, so you gotta wait and wait for it, all the way in the second scene of the second act (middle of the second disc), a haul I couldn’t possibly have held up for as a kid, even the “heroic” parts earlier on wouldn’t’ve held me. But generally it’s okay, and at times (for inst the aria *Sul del Nilo al sacro lido*) is kind of rousing like the *Internationale* (which for whatever it’s worth breathed its first breath the same year, 1871), or a cross between the *Internationale* and “Onward, Christian Soldiers” (same diff if you’re a kid). The second act, ending with a reprise of the march, plays well enough. All in all, I’d have to say I prefer the parts which — like the best of Nino Rota — sound like they could easily devolve into barrel-organ music, or *Finiculi, Finicula* — i.e., those that totter on the brink of not so much kitsch, certainly not grand kitsch, as populist kitsch (folk kitsch?). But even with a shitload of such biz, it’s still in all a little, yes, assembly-hallish (or Italian Boy Scouts). The ending—the opera’s plot solution — burial alive — would likely have appealed to the kid in me who saw mummy movies, but I didn’t actually see those till they started running them on TV, when I was at least 12 or 13.

Second take.

I saw Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry at the Brooklyn Paramount; Elvis on The Ed Sullivan Show; the Beatles at Shea Stadium (twice); the Doors live something like

FORTY times, more than half before Jim even wore leathers (no: jeans and a surfer shirt); Sonny Rollins at the Five Spot after he got down off the Williamsburg Bridge to start gigging again (he had a Mohawk); Ornette Coleman at the Village Vanguard after his woodshed time-out to add trumpet and violin to his arsenal.

The first time I heard the Troggs was on a jukebox as I peed in a urinal, trying to make cigarette filters stand on end while my blind date not exactly waited for me at the bar, a total washout.

I could go on for paragraphs, pages, volumes 'bout all the rock and jazz things I experienced, not only in real time but in their real time — their only time (before history got them — as it gets everyone and everything— wrong, before they got nailed to some idiot conception of the great chain of being, or the Time-Life lie-lie-lie-lie, or worse) and certainly mine (and double certainly theirs and mine in even proximate relevant conjunction); maybe someday I will.

The point for now being simply THIS: I have no context, no history (other than remote; remoter than remote; wholly, utterly adventitious) to plug into when I listen to classical music, no environment in which to meet and greet it even halfway — none in which I really wish to participate (the concert scene, hanging out at Tower Classical, subscribing to archivist/disco-ophile mags) (it's just too, what's the word, yes, too fussy — too Euro, too creepy): no nexus of any sort, any import, OTHER THAN the shoddy Gestalt of childhood, or (and here's the kicker) some icky yucky structural equivalent: stamp collecting, model airplanes, by-the-numbers kid chemistry: a socially redeeming "hobby."

For a—heaven help me — school project (for "extra credit") — I'm still a fucking over-achiever. I diligently sift through exemplars of "baroque," "classical," "romantic," "modern," "avant garde" as I would through the airmail imperforates of Belgium, New Zealand and Estonia; I wiggle my toe in the vast ocean of opera, using my encounter with easy/early Wagner to give me entree to difficult/late, I go from *Aida* to *Rigoletto*, from *Les Preludes* to *A Faust Symphony* to *Mephisto Waltz #1*. I'm, as they say, "learning." I probably don't have enough years left to actually ever come up to speed with it, but I'm also likewise at a stage of mammal froth where such a fact don't faze me. Or do I have it backwards? Is this in fact an apt preoccupation for my coming dotage — pipe and slippers — geezertime, daddy-o?

In any event, it feels somewhat absurd at age 50 or age anything, given the downscale biases of my music-critical past, that I'm sort of reviewing — that I've lived to review — make semireasonable, nonpejorative allusion to — in a single piece — two operas and a tone poem, but, y'know, hey: fuck me.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer dresses up and plays Santa

Far fewer Santa partisans than Elvis partisans are terminal scuzz

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Dec. 14, 1989

Feature Stories



I step lively to my deskchair throne in the northwest corner of Kobey's Swap Meet, Sports Arena parking lot.

The *Times* reported that Steven Jones, an assistant professor of comparative studies at Ohio State University, proclaimed Santa Claus a sexist fertility symbol. "There is an aura of expectancy surrounding Santa's arrival, and he is rotund in the same way as a pregnant woman." Jones said Santa gives things and comes down the chimney, a characteristic of the stork of another myth. "Santa is a male character who has usurped a female's role." —Ishmael Reed, *The Terrible Twos*

St. Nicholas, in addition to protecting sailors, children, travellers, and merchants, is also the patron saint of pawnbrokers.

—Henry Vollam Morton, *In the Steps of St. Paul*

Santa is Satan spelled inside out.

—Rev. Dick Casey, “Keeping the Pornographers Away from Christmas”



Really, I've got no answers 'bout Santa. Or if not none let's call it few. Is Santa symptomatic relief for the seasonal hand-as-dealt, f'rinstance, symptomatic relief within the hand-as-dealt, or simply (in a nutshell) the hand-as-dealt? Can't answer that one, I would really kinda love to but no, cannot — not even after scorching my weenie on the pyre of empirical knowing.

The sacrifice, the offering: to *be* Santa, if only for a day. Less than a day actually, but those hours really drag. In some ways it was worse than a trip to the dentist.

DIET ST. NICK

"You've lost weight, Santa," says more them one wiseass as rigged to the shorthairs like the famed northern fatty I step lively to my spot, my chair, my deskchair throne in the northwest corner of Kobey's Swap Meet, Sports Arena parking lot, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Even with all I et two evenings previous, even with leftovers and a deepgrease breakfast at Burger King, I am no fatso myself, not this week — "Whatsamatter, Santa, Mrs. Claus watering your eggnog?"

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"Ho huh ho," I snap back, adjusting my pillow. If I'm gonna play this asshole I might as well play him right. Probably should've grabbed a belly bundle, so-called, along with

the rest of this shit: the zipper top, the drawstring pants, the 4" belt, the beard, the hair, the hat, the specs, the bottomless, toeless boots, the suspenders, the, that's it, I passed on the gloves. And a sack. All for 65 bucks (plus tax), crushed velvet. Ten bucks more you get upholstery velvet; ten less, a ratty corduroy. No bigspender, no rat, I take the median, the mean: hold the gloves (five more), hold the belly bundle (ten), though in hindsight I probably shouldn't've. This is just to rent, of course. To own you might as well own an upholstery.

Slouching furtively against a booth selling lampshades, I unzip the coat, adjust the 'spenders, fluff the pillow up towards my chin: a fat chest'll fool 'em. Girth ... height...s a good thing I won't be standing (call me Shorty). Fluffed and seated, howev, I'm a credible Claus, down to the Nikes poking out from my bootthings. I reach in my bag for a candy.

Peppermint canes, I have three kinds, I've got Xmas-wrapped chocolates, two kinds of those, hundreds of each. For variety (and ballast), I've also brought some matter from home, worthless objects from my closets and etc., Goodwill-bound anyway so

might as well unload 'em one on one: chartreuse ceramic piggy bank, matching dogshead pencil sharpeners, eight promo 45s by unsung and/or inept C&W vocalists, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* by Michael Chabon (a glib waste of paper you should never read), Douglas Kiker's *Murder on Clam Pond* (tiny type; ditto), *Absalom! Absalom!* with the last 10 pages missing, issue #6 of *Kicks* ("The Bobby Fuller Four Story"), string tie with a murdered scorpion, large bag of broken glass (ONLY KIDDING!), six dozen felt-tip markers found in the trash, three plastic cocktail forks, sample-size Royal Copenhagen stick deodorant, slightly dried 4 fl. oz. Elmer's Glue-All, formerly adjustable San Francisco Giants cap, and a tin of Portugal Pride sardines (no salt added). But no pennies. I did think of it but nah, 800 cent-pieces are heavy, too heavy for whatever limited kid-joy they might trigger. Kids don't want pennies, nobody wants pennies, pennies on swapmeet pavement — I count seven 'tween car and Santa chair —sez nobody wants 'em. (Speaking of valueless.)

So I reach down, come out with matter fresh or stale, wave it overhead: come & git it! And they do.

I, MONSTER; I, SAINT

A warm red will prove exciting, another shade of red will cause pain or disgust through association with running blood.

—Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*

Behind a beard, one belongs a little less to one's bishop, to the hierarchy, to the Church as a political force; one looks freer, a bit of an independent, more primitive in short, benefiting from the prestige of the first hermits, enjoying the blunt candor of the founders of monastic life, the depositories of the spirit against the letter: wearing a beard means exploring in the same spirit the slums, the land of the early Britons or Nyasaland.

—Roland Barthes, "The Iconography of the Abbe Pierre"

He knows when you've been sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good but I don't frigging care if they're bad or good. I don't. For the objectives and purps of the transaction, of our transaction (boys & girls!), bad is as good as good (if not better). This sword-of-vengeance Santa biz has got to go. I've got no truck with such hooey but I'll do the ritual, do it emptily (the best way) for the sake of you know, so when this little girl about four comes up and before I realize it is just goddam hugging me—"Ooh, Santa," squeeze, cuddle, tiny yellow

sweater sleeves on my person —I wait till she's through clinging and tell her, "I know, heh —don't even gotta ask — I know you've been a good little girl," to which she whispers, v. coyly (the little coquette): "No, I haven't." Original guilt!! Or something. (But I dunno, is it ABSOLUTION she's tryin' to score with the hug, a conscious attempt to whore her way into my frail, forgiving heart? Playing me for a sap, is she? Nice try... I don' know.)

Then I'd get these criers and weepers, wailers. Some kids burst when they came within a couple-three yards of me. A female 2-year-old sees me, whimpers, her ma's embarrassed, pushes her closer: WAAAAAA! (Ma takes a candy cane for later.) Male 2'/2'er in a stroller don' like me, goes BAZOONY. Screams, flails, thrusts at my beard, tries to escape but he's strapped to the stroller, looks to mommydaddy for assist 'n' support but they ain't budging: "Look — Santa! It's Santa." Who offers him a larger cane, two canes, three canes and a toy — same deal.

Maybe it's simply the brat has not been primed to meet Santa; prepare him for the meet (the argue might run) and he'd be all googoo—

Irremediable bratbastard misery. And I don't think (one theory) it's the knows when you're awake program that's got him spooked, y'know moral fear 'n' trembling before an allknowing/alljudging Topical Etc. The li'l guy seems a tad too young for such a number, for it to've already been coded in the hokey mythic form of some whitebearded fuck.

Or maybe it's simply the brat has not been primed to meet Santa; prepare him for the meet (the argue might run) and he'd be all googoo — genuine or otherwise — all smiles. Santa as surprise changes the setup, but what in the setup — worst-case scenario — could be so monstrous, could scare (so possibly literal) a load out of 'em? I can't imagine it's the velvet, the red, so it must be the beard, the actual beard (qua opti-primordial etc.). HEY: this is no Jerry Garcia whisker module we're talkin', no Gary Blackman (you don't know him) or Kenny Rogers avuncular tuft. There's nothing benign or grampslke 'bout the Laocoon special which extends past my belt, the Mesopotamian rectangle-thatch which... you get the picture. SANTA (PER SE) AS MONSTER. Santa is monster! Or maybe it's me — do I smell bad? [Sniff, sniff.]

Easily the greatest short-run series of all time, CBS's *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* brought a different monster to Chicago for each of its 13 installments. First a vampire, then a werewolf, a zombie, a mummy, a dinosaur in the sewers, a robot, a variation on Bigfoot, then they ran out of mainstream spookems and hadda go with stuff like this giant from the Middle Ages who used a crossbow and, I dunno, I think there was some sort of "living electricity" — the kind that thinks (and is evil) — in a

new office building... the pickings got lean (and leaner). So HOW, I'm wondering now, could they have missed these two beauts: self and Santa? Kolchak seeks monster, the monster is him. Next week: Santa. Or would sponsors have objected to this corporate 'deconstruction' of the old winter fughead? Santa's market 'message': spend that ye may give to expectant urchins?? Receive that ye may expect/demand more of same??

(Is shit I am thinking as rain starts to fall.)

SANTA AND ELVIS

When I rented my Claus suit the haggard folks I rented from were, they said, "just getting over the Halloween rush." Obviously, from certain obvious p.o.v.'s, Christmassinamerica has become in recent years something of a secondary Halloween, no, not secondary, second: a second take on trick or treat in less than two months. Maybe it's Halloween itself whose relative stakes have been upped, but whatever. If Actual Santa (idealized, Himself) is the promise of an upped trick-or-treat ante, of a higher bounty soon to shake its buns, then mall Santa and department store Santa and swap meet Santa (as present-tense, immediate-gratification stand-ins for Himself) are the dregs of Halloween: trick-or-treat pickings ante'd down. (Would you eat candy canes? / wouldn't eat candy canes. Even as a child I abstained.)

From Halloween to Christmas there's a v. crucial reversal: at Christmas it's the giver not the receiver who dresses up, who plays (and must play) if not monster then clown. Buffoon. Or whatever it is that Stand-in Santa ideally (i.e., conventionally) is. A child-compliant, parental-user-friendly comic jerkington. And it ain't so much that parents posit in this bozo ultimate responsibility for placating their little darlings, for momentarily keeping Christmas (qua screaming Demand) at bay — that part's easy — it's simply they aren't the ones donning the IDIOT SUIT, suitplaying the dipshit (not for their own!): a dirty biz but someone's gotta do it. Comic costumed servitude is comic costumed servitude — right? — and c.c.s. can't help but render even the Santa "impulse" ludicrous, or if not ludicrous then (tamer wd.?) bathetic.

The only mega-role 'lower' is that of Elvis. Ronald McDonald — is he multiplayable? (Does every town have a Ronald on hold?) (A Ronald uniform?) Elvis and Santa: some comparisons. Santa's validity as concept, as function, is most readily undermined by age, Elvis's by history — his own history. The last incontrovertible echo of his initial viable GASP, for inst, was "Teddy Bear" — spring '57 — after which he essentially became his own first (if not best) impersonator. Santa, meanwhile, having no personal history, is merely, normally outgrown & abandoned. [NOTE: while

a case could be made that the oldtimer is “currently” employed by Scrooge (among grimy others), just as Elvis once worked for the Colonel, didn’t he “always” (in an ahistoric sense) show no preference for employer, the ultimate freelance grub?] Elvis, far too often unabandoned (in a Time that cares not for History), counts as nondetractors countless feebs, dupes, self-deluders and diehard simps — i.e., far fewer Santa partisans than Elvis partisans are terminal scuzz.

Now, if we consider the ongoing mass response to that relatively finite number who don the costume of President...

THE RAIN WITHOUT, THE SWEAT WITHIN

And so, apropos of my opening dentist line, how, why, in what way(s) izzit torturous? Well, okay, I’ve got a cold, a cold sore and I hate crowds, especially shopping crowds, and well-behaved children mean about as much to me as show dogs or trained seals or bears that ride bicycles. It’s the infantile unconscious, so-called — the source of all Life, Meaning and Whoopee — that appeals to me, that I seek living instantiations of, but aside from a few panicky toddlers I’ve barely encountered much juvenile outpour. All I’ve seen is kids accepting bad candy or a mutilated Faulkner, telling me they want a skateboard for Xmas (“What color?” “Green”) or a Barbie (“Just one?” “No, two” — mommy loves that one). I wanna meet some young anarchists, sonsdaughters who say Yabbadabbadabbadabbadoodooweeweefuggadugga-wugga, Jack or at least For Xmas, Santa, I would v. much like a ton of squid with spider sauce, make that skyblue spider sauce. If they don’t, who needs ‘em?

Actually, two kids say goodstuff. A perky 5-year old asks: “What color are your eyes?” “Red,” I tell her, but she knows better: “No, what color are they really?” “Brown.” “I knew it.” An hour later, an observant 6-year-old, spotting the Philadelphia Flyers watch peering out under my Santa sleeve, tells me: “That’s a dumb-looking Santa watch.” For which I’m truly grateful. Precious mem’ries I’ll retain for at least a week or, should I reread this, longer.

Anyway, a cold. Got one. My mustache is a wad of mucous and sheepdog hair, and the rain’s really coming down now, wetting (and weighing down) my cap and coat. Pillow, pants and feet’re already sopping from all the sweat. This suit was made for suff’ring: discomfort designed, factored, in. Chin cloth tight on jaw, restricting speech. Hair over eyes, glasses foggy — if some kid came at me with an Uzi I wouldn’t see jackshit. As Christ’s secular bodydouble I guess it’s my lot to suffer. (A neglected reading of Andres Serrano’s “Piss Christ”: Christ exists to be iconically

abused; to be eternally, perpetually abused; if not, He's abdicated half the role of being

Christ.) Santa w/an umbrella: dig the distress!

Or maybe I'm just a grouchy old cuss, an old crank, a cranky old fart (Yes, I admit it: not a young man!) and I'm proud. Or whatever.

S.C. TAKES A LEAK

Faith is the opposite of love. Love recognizes virtue even in sin, truth in error. It was faith, not love, not reason, which invented Hell.

— Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*

Disbelief — healthy; neurotic; merely rational — has always been a piece o' the pie. Nearly four decades past, when I was 5 or 6, there was this Thanksgiving telecast from a couple of cities simultaneous, back and forth with crosscuts and stuff, each one featuring a parade with a Santa. What the deuce? I wondered (the seeds of doubt). And today at Kobey's, ripples of suspicion from the peanut gallery: "What's Santa doing here?" Good question but is that here, San Diego?

Here, Kobey's (as opposed to Horton Plaza)? Or simply here, where-we-now-happen-to-be? Ripples.

Nobody ever really tries that hard to maintain the ruse, and why should they? Kids find out, fuck 'em, they'll live, right? — and if not now, next year — 's an e-z way of shuffling in benign disillusionment. It's also, in the meantime, generatrix of an oddly casual (& oft cavalier) blend of parental caution and caution-to-the-wind, a mixed strategy of forcefeeding faith while toying with a tyke's goddam psyche — which is par for prob'ly any parental course (what the hey), no harm, no foul. What's cheesy is it too often ends with Santa, never gets extended to ritual forcefeedings of more substantial import, like God per se (or Country). Too few ruses are age-coded if y'ask me; far too many are portioned and ladeled in life doses.

THE PISS SANTA — My candies and trash all gone, I head for the Sports Arena men's rm. Along with men are boys, and a boy no more than 6-6 1/2 follows my progress. The gig complete, my cold in overdrive, I'm of no mind to continue the masquerade, observers notwithstanding. Junior eyes me first with curiosity (gee: so Santa tinkles too), then, as I remove the beard, confusion, and finally, as I swig "Santa tonic" (a

cognac miniature): what, anger? Yup. The kid is not benignly disillusioned: he is pissed.

OTHER SANTAS, OTHER MALLS

Though his toes stick out just as far as mine did, the Horton Plaza Santa is a tall sonofabitch in white gloves and upholstery-velvet suit who sits on this actual ersatz throne, quite regal (or let's say: Horton Plaza regal) amid seasonal chintz beyond swap meet capability. Kids do occasionally cry (so it wasn't mere surprise, and it probably wasn't me) but they line up long and straight (my only lines were two deep, lateral, and moving) and, finished with the encounter, they receive stiff paper fold-a-buildings which resemble, at the safe distance from which I observe, architectural modules of Horton Plaza itself: this (inotherwords) is a Santa, a Santa concept, a Scrooge-generated Santa ruse, which should be napalmed. (Or something.) Compared to this Death Santa, I was one guiltless, guileless Li'l St. Nick, and though I will never be him/play him again ... th' fuck do / know?

Next: I play dentist for a day ... with YOUR teeth! □

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer descends on Horton Plaza

Where the hideous meets the invidious

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[March 2, 1989](#)

Feature Stories

Gaslamp

Okay, let's start from the top:

The ugliest unit eyescape in Horton Plaza, and I mean the ugggliest, is the view straight on with your back to this kid store called Gymboree on the topmost level of the joint, so-called North, Level 3 – the fabulous "Galleria" level. Take the elevator or stairs, walk don't run, lean against the rail facing south for prob'ly the stupidest view of that stupid stoopid tall sharp-angled Thing most people prob'ly think of when they think of the Plaza — that big black/white/brown wedge of metaphorical Cheese

with the farcical Arches which make merry architecture Reference but little (if any) nongratuitous architectural Sense.

And above the arches, circles. Circles "cut" or "punched" in the swiss...jarlsberg...gouda. As it were: "holes." Holes with a fencelike mesh of varying thickness creating (a) the kitschy outlines of a Greek cross and concentric inner circle ("halo") and (b) an obstacle, presumably, to pigeons getting too cozy a foot, er, clawhold and doodying the beauty (directly) below. Only from the v. top walkway can these circles be viewed at approx. their own level; can they thus be gauged to in fact be circles (as opposed to common ellipses); can we determine with any degree of empirical certainty why feathered friends larger than sparrows do not indeed nest, even rest, in their roomy concavity. More importantly, only from this height may we use them as holes qua holes, may we gaze directly through them to the other side. The circle/hole we seek: leftmost on the cheddar's northern face.

And through this aperture, through its meshwork cross and mini-halo, we see: portions of Two other Aps! And their crosses and etc. (And sky beyond.) From the inside p.o.v. of the southern cheeseface. "Revealed" Gratuitous Structure cannot be beat. Time for a treat:

White chocolate chunk w/macadamias at Mrs. Fields Cookies. Small "Super" fruit shake at Bananas. Small order cheese fries at Boardwalk Fries. Cookie stale, greezy, so sweet it tastes salty. Shake iceheavy, tasteless. Spuds themselves excellent; cheese liquid, gluey; *sensational* grease. Time to return to a theme of the piece:

(Which goes like this.) Horton Plaza, the whole damn thing, is, Eye contend, the eyesorest urban/suburban consumption park ("mall") in the land, the third or fourth Most Hideous architecturally begotten whatsit (any genre, anywhere) Eye have actually, personally, so far Seen. That so repellent a mass of shit has been deemed even marginally mass-acceptable is something Eye, a broadminded, whimsical dude, cannot begin to fathom. That San Diegans of so many stripes have in fact embraced it, rather than napalmed or radically defaced it, makes me fear for the future of Vision. (Or something like that.) And what say U?

"I like it, I *like* it," says Kate Loholly, dental hygienist, Golden Hill. "It's a great place to meet." Meet? "People." People. First let's meet some stores.

Come Buy With Me, Come Buy, Let's...I'm gonna buy something, I don't know what. I've got no material needs, not per se, no wants, no itches in need of imminent scratching. Don't wanna sound like a saint but I've got no neuroses (current(that

compel me to merely purchase. The hankerings will be minimal, less than minimal, let's see if I can even scare up the "motivation"...

The Candy Barrel. Imagine: candy in barrels. (What'll they think of next?)

Banana Republic. Imperialism as hip, cool and (above all) chic. Imagine.

Wicks 'n' Sticks. Candles 'n' candles. ('N' matches.)

Storton's Men Fashion Theatre (rhymes with "He ate 'er"). James Dean in left window, Clark Gable in right. Be a rebel, be a gent: stop and shop garments either way.

House of Almonds. Featuring: pistachios - "Our lowest price of the year" - \$4.97/lb. Now let's see if Kite Country has jockstraps. Nope, just kites.

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Horton Toy & Doll. Ant farms make my-t-fine wedding gifts. Many times I've given. They are always well received. Sooner or later someone else I know will be regist'ring his/her lovematch with the state. But all they got's the "deluxe" version - 23 bucks and change. "You don't have the, um, regular model?" "Ten dollars, we're all out." "When're you - " "In a couple weeks. This one's better." Nuh thanx. (Ameri-fascist flag poster on the door.)

Caswell-Massey. Ok, I know what I'll get: snuff. A great tobacco buzz. If you've used up your lungs, try your nose. "We no longer carry it." Just a buncha soap.

The Far Side. Stand that sells nothing but Gary Larson "Far Side" products - books, calendars, coffee mugs, shirts.

B. Dalton Software Etc. Exiting the book biz? (Nobody reads no more, right?)

Le Travel Store. Don't even wanna know what this one sells.

Leather Station. Like a dining-car restaurant. Leather food? Handbags.

Bally's of Switzerland. It would not kill me to own a leather jacket. Black or brown - I'd wear it a few times a year. Let's see, here's gray, elastic waistband, not what I had in mind but okay, try it on. Seems to fit, fits nicely, smells good, doesn't look too - how much's it cost? "Nine thirty-five." "Dollars or pesos?" "Dollars." "A little beyond my budget." "That's all right, I understand." It's nice to be understood.

The Gap. Home of the \$9.00 pocket tee. Strong primary colors, bright, and a decent black, I believe I'll – "Hi, how ya doin' today?" I look up, there's this shop guy, must be the front-end version of "Have a nice day" (the obligatory closer). Bummed and annoyed, I grunt, "Fine," meaning Fuckyoushitheadleavemealone. He says, "Good," then on to the next shopper: "Hi, how ya doin' today?" Shopper says, "Wonderful!" – i.e., wow gee, gladtobealivewellandshopping. Shop guy says, "Good" – same tone, same volume, same nuance of sincerity as he'd used on me. No difference. Fuckyouinbotheearswithcancer. (I'll not buy from robots.)

Brookstone. Everything you never wanted/needed: practical, playsome, whatev. Humidifiers. Golfball polishers. Wood games with steel balls and holes. "Who says garden gloves have to be ugly?" – paisley leather gauntlet, \$22.50. "Welcome this charming outdoor 'pet' " – cast iron toad, \$25.

Super Star. "Become a Video Super Star," lip-sync or sing, choose from over 40 backgrounds, \$29.95. I'd rather walk my eel.

The price of His Toys. Board games, board games, ho hum, what's this? Pink undergarment on a wire-stem stick. "Fresh Cut Panties – the wearable gift." Perfect gift for mom. You've Made A Sale.

Food Break #2. "Grand Gobbler" from The Steak Escape. Quesadilla con pollo (w/ salsa "fuego") from La Salsa. Thai tea from Croce's. Et pour dessert, chocolate-covered glazed pineapple thing from Chocolate Carousel. Gobbler (grilled turkey breast, provolone, mushroom, pepper, onion w/ lettuce & tomato on a mayonnaisy roll) is the shits. Worst Philly steak sandwich (or variation) I've ever et. Quesadilla is passable, salsa good and hot w/ rich body and tomato-y-ness (in the good sense of the latter). Tea, iced, is acceptably sweet and and moderately quenchy but the styrofoam cup doesn't play: a switch to hard plastic is strongly recommended. Pineapple thing is like eating a honey-dipped sock.

What's that crackling sound? *Walkie-talkies*. Whose walkie-talkies? Horton Plaza security geeks. What are they securing? Not readily apparent. Crackle crackle – all over the place. A mute idiot clown in yellow and blue, half his face painted (only half), lurches through the throng like a storebought Pee-Wee Herman: Horton hirelings in heat.

Hideous sight gag #2. *Second* ugliest eyeful in H.P. is you stand outside La Salsa facing north, eyes angled slightly towards the next level up — that sillysilly domed thing with bas-relief lions' heads and icecream-swirl pillars, and that phonus balonus "bridgework" biz behind it — or is it just a fake pointed "roof"? Spin around a bit in

the same gen'ral area — on the La Salsa side — and you'll catch these incredibly incongruous Angkor Wat-like protuberances (conical broccoli?) tacked on the railing. What's This Shit "Mean"? What does it "Signify"? As "Thing in Itself" What The Fucking Hell "Is" It?

Jake looked once more at the crumpled Polaroid. Unattractive sex partners are okay, he thought. Even flat-out uggles. It's the person behind the sex that really matters. He smiled and put the spread shot of Ernestine down. — Richard Ford "Pudenda"

Persons. Let's not forget all the persons. Here to shop, eat, meet and greet other shoppers, eaters and meeters: to play the assigned "mall role" with supreme dedication. In this most unfrightening of artificial environs they are fearlessly purposeful, rising with an insect unity and efficiency to the task at hand: to not only maximally consume (thus perpetuating not only this island of lost consumers but the very "principles" of consumption) but to do so while manifesting object signs of actually, fervently Enjoying It — like they're happy as tourists in shit. I have never at any other mall — never!! — seen townies and tourists (per se) behave as *indistinguishably*, as uniformly uncritically, as undeviatingly *docilely* — like lambs to slaughter w/ Smiles. Evidence that Absolute Design can and will meet its Absolute Prey, that demographic greenhorns (as projected!) will roll over and play dead on the dotted line (on the dotted line!).

But wait — not everyone is playing. Playing mall; playing dead. On the "Esplanade" level is this solemn middleaged Asian guy, yes I'd call him Japanese, bearded, hair knotted in back, sandaled, robed. A long white flowing monk type of robe. Radiating serenity, carrying zilch. Someone who would pretty much have to either be an actual real Zen monk or be playing a Zen monk — no other possibility springs to mind. In any event, he is not buying panties, nor eating greasemeat, nor politely grinning at yuppie dorks and dolts. More tellingly, he is not remotely tickled by the highjinks of the idiot clown. He is here, apparently, and merely, to cruise Being (as it were), to do so without kissing being's Topical Ass. A security goon spots him, briefly tails him, i.d.'s him as nobody's dotted liner, passes the word electronically to a colleague down the line: "There's a weird-looking...guy up near you." *Crackle, crackle*. "Got a beard and a long...robe or something. You see him?" *Crackle*. "Keep an eye on him." Follow that monk!!

Rain In Horton Plaza: "Caution — Wet Floor." Floor? — not pavement? Pavement as floor. A leak in the roof, the ceiling? Sky roofs 're notoriously thin. Accordion muzak Blasting. Are we "indoors" or "out"?

Meal #3. "Upscale" brunch at the Irvine Ranch Farmers Market. New Zealand mussels and a persimmon; fresh-squeezed juice. Mussels alternate between plump/dry (like cotton) and stringy/chewy (like rubber bands). Persimmon, ripe to the touch but not the tongue, is like a warm styptic popsicle. Without the juice (orange) I'd be fucked. Shoulda had sushi or a...

- meetcha
- at Pogo Pizza
- if it is not good we can
- go and smoke
- dope
- in
- the
- car

If we can *find* the car. Did we park it in Strawberry or Avocado? Rhubarb? Or was it Celery? "Images" instead of numbers/letters — maybe they're on to something — but how's about making them a little more striking, thus mem'able, than cartoon veggies and fruits? Some suggested replacements.

Pineapple: skunks fucking. Corn: Jesus with a Charger helmet. Lemon: rectal thermometer. Carrot: large bandaged dog wound. Watermelon: can of STP. Pepper: Stratocumulus cloud formation. Tomato: Matisse's *Piano Lesson*. Orange: amoeba shaking "hands" with a paramecium. Artichoke: Dracula played by Michael Pataki. Onion: half of Steve Garvey's head being spit out by Shamu. Cherry: Pete Wilson with an arrow through his liver. Grape: Roger Hedgecock scratching his dick.

But tough park or not, car is it. Enter on foot and you run the risk of encountering, ugh, *them*. Those dirtydreadfullywretchedhomeless individuals who might, gosh, hit on you for change and whatnot along the perimeter, but who rarely make it inside past security. The park outside Robinson's is lousy with scenes of them living, or attempting to live, their grimwretchedcircumscribed call-it-a-life. If I ruled the world, the Shit of these people would be dinner for every insect-minded Horton Plaza automaton, and the Blood of the latter would be soda pop f'r these people. (But I don't even rule this frigging page.)

WHAT'S PLAYING? *TwinsCocoonIIMyStepmotherIsanAlien*. I'll pass. The only time I was ever physically inside the UA Horton Plaza 7 it felt like being up some sort of tall, spindly water tower — all those stairs, y'know. How ironic that probably the most

insulatedly indoor space aboard ship)i.e., the "safest") should also seem the most "precarious."

WHAT TIME IS IT? Generic "future"...generic "past"...generic "present": *all* malls, by design, stand beyond time, apart from history. This mall apart from history has as its centerpiece a Clock. The hokey, "old fashioned" Jessop's clock. Ahistoric time as old fashioned, i.e., reactionary: time as Mammon. (The "golden" Jessop's clock.) Time as provisional gift of a Class, i.e., as revocable public Property, (Jessop's "promotional" clock.)

And *where*, ultimately, are we? Two Horton specialty shops offer clues: (1) *We are somewhere outside Nature*. The Nature Company — the name says it all — has brought Nature in (from the place or places elsewhere where it naturally occurs). (2) *We're dead center in a Universe of tourist-centric geo-hoop-dee-doo*. San Diego — A View of the World purveys framed posters &etc, (based in that New Yorker cover with New York as "center") of all the various geo-cliches which ought appear along cartographic sightlines radiating from designated centers. San Diego/Paris/Detroit/Minneapolis/Cape Cod/[Your geo-favorite goes here]. Center, dead, of a Universe outside Nature? Sounds about right. A walk on the Nordstrom side. I'd been told about these \$80 white shirts. Eighty-dollar white shirts should never, under any circumstances, be bought & owned but they may be observed. Touched. "Learned from." Project: defang Nordstrom by dealing with it as a museum. (Of supply-side arrogance; of marketplace shame.) I enter, head for men's apparel, circle twice, but nowhere do I find an \$80 men's white shirt — highest is \$60. (Of all the silly rumors.) Exiting, I spot this white bloke in a black tux at a black keyboard. Closer, I note with pleasure he is playing an Ellington medley: "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me," "Satin Doll." All by the Duke. (No one is especially "listening.") I step up, ask for Ellington's "The Clothed Woman." He doesn't know it. Ask for "All Too Soon." Doesn't know it. "Lady of the Lavender Mist." Nope. "Jack the Bear." Ditto. You Can't Have Everything.

The last supper. One final feed (with nobody's doo-doo in it, nobody's blood.) Gyros and a medium Coke from The Great Gyros. "La Jolla" from Boudin's Bakery. Gyros okay ('cept the sauce, the veggies, the bread). Coke superb. La Jolla (turkey and Havarti cheese on sourdough roll) tastes like — and could v. well be — actual food. Yum yum yummy num num! A fine dine save for the sights you must endure while ingesting.

[The architecture of Godin] was clearly intended for the freedom of people. Yet no one could enter or leave the place without being seen by

everyone — an aspect of the architecture that could be totally oppressive. But it could only be oppressive if people were prepared to use their own presence to watch over others. --- Foucault, *ibid*.

A perfectly harmless teen interracial lowlife crew. Two boys, two girls, four nonmiddleclass teens, two black/white heterosexual couples. Carryin' on, makin' out (kissy feely), making noise. Freely uttering the f-and the s-word. Behaving as "at-home" in Horton Plaza's Food Court as at a beach, a park or something. Though they directly affront nobody's mom, though they "keep to" their table and refrain from throwing either food scraps or nonbiodegradable styrofoam, jackjills at adjacent and nearby tables clearly resent their action. An Ed Meese lookalike and his babe brush bride scowl and glower. Mother of two towhead brats tenses her (not unattractive) repression-scarred mug. A dowager grandma winces 'tween bites of her bun.

Look, *nobody* especially gets off on other people's fun, not as a rule, no, but nobody digs *these* teeners' teenfun Nohow. You can never really know these things, but I'd certainly *guess* there are many here/now who would welcome the psychic power to wish 'em dead. The scorn! The revulsion! But nothing, of course, verbal...

At least The Plaza doesn't poison pigeons. They could, you know.

Last paragraph. That obelisk out front. Th' one that resembles a circa-'68 pen & pencil kit. With that goofy-looking sun w/ a mustache and the spotted wildcat and white dove or seagull and red/orange fishthing. Is the third ugliest whoozis in the joint. In the ugliest consumer park in North, South, or Central America. The loathsome mall in (perhaps) the World.

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Jesus had his diaper changed.

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"That's the value of a brand. They've got the domain name."

Like MP3.com's Michael Robertson, James Gambale runs a San Diego-based Internet music-distribution company. But unlike Robertson, Gambale has a much harder task to bring attention to his website called CableMusic.com. A former engineer with General Dynamics, Gambale and four others man the Sorrento Valley company. He cofounded Cablemusic.com without — what he claims is MP3.com's huge advantage — its name.

"That domain name is extremely valuable. CableMusic.com is a good name, but it's not MP3.com. When you think of bidding on the Internet, what do you think of? eBay.com. There are seven other sites, but you tend to just think of eBay. Everybody associates the technology of putting CDs on the Web with MP3.com. They have the mind share of the masses. We don't have the brand, but what we do have is insights into the technology.... We launched virtually the same thing as MyMP3 months before he did. It's frustrating we didn't get credit for it, but it's great to see validation of the idea."

Gambale said he beat MP3.com to the punch with JACK, which preceded MyMP3.com.

"We were the first company to deliver it to the Web, in October of last year. [MyMP3.com was introduced in January.] But the big difference is when we deployed that technology, we left the instant upload out because we knew it was problematic from the licensing point of view. We want to take our time with the labels and figure out what the licensing issues are."

Gambale maintains that the instant upload feature is what helped trigger the lawsuit against MP3.com by the Recording Industry Association of America. He suggests that his company may win in the long run because he has worked with the record companies, not against them.

"We are very respectful of the industry that has invested in their product. More than \$400,000 was spent on Sarah McLachlan when she was 19 or 20 when she first started out. I can think of no other business except for maybe the oil business where you would gamble so much money on an unproven commodity."

It is Gambale's contention that music distribution on the Web is inevitable but that record companies and artists have to be both protected and involved.

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"We obtained a license from the RIAA to do Internet radio. We know of two other larger sites that have done the same thing. We took the slower, conservative, cautious approach. We want to create incredible convenience without trampling the rights of copyright owners. I'm not implying that MP3.com is trying to trample rights."

In fact, Gambale said he hopes MP3.com, which has 10 million registered clients worldwide, will survive. "They have a huge bully pulpit to do the whole industry a lot of good by clarifying issues. If they continue to vilify and fight the labels, that's bad. It does a disservice to the consumer. If MP3.com goes down, if their stock goes to nothing, and they sell off their assets, that would be terrible. All the people who were loyal MP3.com listeners would be left hanging."

One challenge to both CableMusic.com and MP3.com might come from the music labels. Last week it was announced that Sony Music and Universal Music, two of the big five conglomerates, would join forces to launch their own subscription-based digital music service.

"It's going to be in the interest of the labels to have a third party involved. When people buy CDs, they don't go to a Sony Records store. Why would that be any different on the Internet?"

Gambale said he's been in discussions with major labels. "I don't want to comment directly on who we're talking to and who we're not talking to.... I don't think it's bad for the consumer that the copyright issues are being flushed out. The consumer needs to understand that the music isn't free."

—Ken Leighton

"St. Cecilia's is sacred to me because I met my wife at a Chinchilla show there over five years ago," says Eric Neilsen, Maquiladora's guitar player. St. Cecilia's Church, an old funeral chapel that has been home to Sledgehammer Theater since 1992, has also been a recording space for Maquiladora.

"The sound is fantastic. The stained glass windows shine rays of purple and...adds to the ambience. There's even a camera obscura from a hole in the front door. If you make the area a little bit smaller [lessen the focal length] with a piece of paper, you can see all the action on Sixth Avenue, upside down, people walking and cars flying by on the walls of the lobby.... We are mainly using the space to inspire our performances. It's thrilling to be singing at full volume or overdubbing a dirty guitar and have it fill up that space."

Maquiladora's Lost Works of Eunice Phelps, an album about a friend's "encounter" with a dead country singer, got the band a gig on KPBS. "It was a lot of fun playing live...but the interview was fairly torturous."

The band's new release, *White Sands*, is now out on Lotushouse Records.

—*Robert Nutting*

The Ships and Salsa excursion is just the latest local radio promotion that didn't turn out as planned.

"One time we had six brand-new Yugos that we were giving away," said one former employee of 91X. "We had them in a parade. I think it was St. Patrick's Day. During the parade three of them broke down. [The station manager] made us push them for the rest of the parade."

There were other promotions that went bad. The second Mission Beach roller-coaster promotion staged by Star 100.7 in 1998 backfired as many blamed the station for exploiting its listeners. Then there was the time [a local station] took two buses full of skiers to Big Bear. "One of the buses crashed into the other," said one who was on the bus. "The listeners were stranded for hours waiting for a ride down the hill. Then there was the time we had the Expose the X contest." The listener who displayed a 91X logo in the most conspicuous way won \$25,000. "One guy painted his house with the logo. The only problem is he was a renter and he didn't have permission from his landlord. He was fined by the city for violating a sign ordinance.

"One time [former 91X morning DJ] Bryan Jones went on the air on 91X and encouraged people to 'trash the Flash' [92.5 "The Flash" was at that time a competitor of 91X]. He encouraged people to defame the Flash any way they could. It got out of hand when a steel trash can got thrown through the front window.... And then there was the first X-Fest concert [in 1983 at Jack Murphy Stadium]. The 91X studios were still in Tijuana. One of the guys in Bow Wow Wow was asked how he liked San Diego. He said, 'We love California pussy' on the air. It was the first time

that station did a remote broadcast from north of the border.” It was feared this first-ever remote from the U.S. would upset the Mexican FCC and botch any future plans for 91X to broadcast from the States. Ten years ago 91X started broadcasting entirely from the U.S.

Longtime local DJ Shotgun Tom Kelly, now heard on KRTX in Los Angeles, recalled a whole different set of radio promotion snafus: “In the mid-’80s when KCBQ was a country station, they had a fishing derby at San Vicente Lake. The guy that caught five fish first won. When this one guy caught fish number five, he stood up in his boat and yelled that he won. He had a heart attack right then and fell over and died.

“Then there was the time [FM progressive rock station] KPRI had the ‘Dream Valley concert in your mind.’ It was supposed to be taking place in some farmer’s field in Jamul. All these people went out there, and of course there was no concert. The station was just playing music and crowd sound effects. The sheriff had to go out there and chase everybody away.”

Shotgun Tom himself gave a memorable public appearance hosting a Cat Stevens concert at the Community Concourse in downtown San Diego. “He went up onstage and did his ‘BLEEEEE-HAHHHHH, this is Shotgun Tom Kelly,’ ” recalls former KPRI DJ Gabriel Wisdom. “He came out dressed like he had just come from central casting for The Mod Squad, and he had his Smokey the Bear hat on. He said something like, ‘Hey, San Diego, are you floating on a cloud of groovy vibes?’ He got a standing boonation. When Cat Stevens came out he said, ‘I’ve never been introduced that way before.’ ”

—Ken Leighton

CD review: Rocket from the Crypt, All Systems Go 2, Swami SWA 2001

Is Rocket from the Crypt San Diego’s finest — and grandest — and hottest rock AND ROLL — y’know BOTH, and only both, and NOTHING BUT both — band? You bet. Absofuckinglutely.

They’re a band that if it were 1979, and punk (as such) had never happened, and a harder core of metal had never happened, and neither of them ever would happen, y’know as “competition,” or even just a context for “comparison,” would probably be RATHER FUCKING IMPORTANT in the grand cultural scheme of things — nationally, internationally, intergalactically, whatever.

It so happens, however, that this disc, consisting of 25 tunes recorded at 13 separate sessions, contains nothing but great, truly great, magnificent even, simplebasicsavage greasydirty music for which there is NO LONGER A PLACE IN THE WORLD, the world as it is, except as an anachronism, or to put the most functional light on it, as theme music for the endless party, the endless plague, the endless fix, the endless fuck, the endless foodfight, the endless mope, the endless headbang, the endless pose, the endless piss, the endless crawl, the endless terminal slide into greater endlessness...all of which, of course, END.

I would say that, hands down, this is the GREATEST ROCK AND ROLL DOCUMENT San Diego has ever had a role in birthing. I would say it because I have to say it — because it's simply fucking TRUE.

—*Richard Meltzer*

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Best Of

Housepets I've in all likelihood killed or maimed

Thinking isn't doing

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

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Feature Stories



It's ALWAYS tragic to step on a snail.

Cute! Cuddly! Humanly owned/operated livingthings whose lives were brutishly TERMINATED or BECLOUDED through fault of my own: fluff, snuggly!

Bunnies: possibly. Slammed one with the headlight of my '49 Merc — reddened hi-beam as clear proof of impact. Question is, did it hop away or bounce away? (A kill or a mere mutilation?) And was it owned, housed, caged and out on recess, a dinner break — or just another hip hop nature-bunny, backroads Long Island '66? Ascertainment of pethood: doubtful. So let's not COUNT IT.

Count my snake, tho. Definitely. My little 7-8-9" ribbon snake or garter snake or whatever in heck the thing was. Bland dark coloration with yellowish stripes. No fangs. Bit me once and left barely an imprint. Wasn't eating worms so I fed it a salamander. Both died. 1959. (It was a very dead year.)

It's ALWAYS tragic to step on a snail. Lawn snails ... street snails (in precincts where applicable)... pond snails. Crunch, they're done: could Arthur effing Miller be tragicker? Trample yer own snail, tho, and you've reached the acme — the ajax! — the pinnacle of gastropod illfortune. (Aeschylus could not do you justice.) You ... me ... you would have to be dwunk and I was. Couple beers, me and my snail, the petite little slimer was outside my door in the rain. Streetlamps reflecting off his delicate shell, I lifted cautiously with midfinger and thumb, inviting him in for a Pabst Blue Ribbon. We shared a sudsy glass: he, crawling upside the vessel with shell in tow, bending down at the lip to dip face in froth; I, sipping/slugging in conventional manner. One bottle gone, I stepped lively for another — about face, left turn, falsestep, CRUNCH — a crisp, aurally pleasing crunch — you don't get such crunches from stepping on Rice Krispies — but a goesuffused crunch nonetheless. O me! o my! o mea culpa! (Have I ever fully recovered?)

Hamsters: none.

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Dogs: are too worthless even to kick. Kicking a dog is like beating a rug; killing a dog is like washing one. Dogs are stupid and breathy, rugs smelly, dogloyal: who needs 'em? Stupids? Breathies? Ruggards? Loyalists? So you might kick one to get back at a jerk, for instance Carl Panter. I think I once kicked his. In a halfassed, halfhearted way. His chow chow the size of a pig. Or thought about it.

Thinking of kittendeath. Closeup of a whitewhite babycat. Meow meow — zoom in on face — drowned out by sounds of a car engine revving. Cut to gloved hand on stickshift toying with the gears. Swing up to dashboard, windshield, pull focus: red traffic signal from driver's p.o.v. Back to kitten, howling wildly now, wider angle reveals five identical kitcats, each more adorable than the next, all inconsolable, their collars lashed to the rear wheel of an orange '65 Mustang. Light turns green, driver lets 'er rip. Wide angle, intercut with closeups, exquisite slo-mo of kitty after kitty being mashed to wintered kitpaste by collision with blacktop. — Thinking isn't doing.

And doing isn't... okay, I don't care for kittens, for itty bits of purr fur, but grownup cats, sheez ... I would give my write arm not to have done this. Phoebe Snell's Catalan: not a man, not a bat- (or a super-) man, not a hybrid man/cat — a man like cat. Cats in gen'ral tend to be manlike, not that men are much to write home about, a lot more like 'em than dogs (dogs are closer to goats — or to pumpkins — than to humans), but this cat was quitelike a MAN. A unique male PERSON. With a distinct personality and presence. He'd walk up and start talking like there was no language

barrier, no need for cat shorthand, none of this meow/feed me, meow/pet me bullshit. His utterances were strong, complex, and unambiguously specific, and could not've been read as expressing anything other (for inst) than Another day, huh? or Get these damn kids outta here — he didn't much like children (or their so-called energy), and he didn't like kittens. (Hissed at both.) Clawed the bejeez out of *TV Guide* (as a decent person would & should) but not *Westways*, not *Car Craft*, just the *Guide*. And like many persons he had pets of his own, a pet, Phoebe's ultraneglected Phobia, in her own neurotic catright a person too: a stunted dumbperson.

His fleas, tho, while his, were not his pets — he didn't want them. Nor I, altho catsitting while Phoebe was in jail I was forced to contend with them. Each day for a month I'd go feed him, him and Phobia, and right off I notice these shiny black specks on my white socks, white T-shirt — anything white — working through the weave to eat me, suck me dry — they quiteliked my flavor (apparently). In two-three days I've got 200 bites, 200 bloodscabby itchlumps. I start dressing dark and just to be safe tie a white plastic bag over each shoe and pants leg, bind 'em at the calf and sure 'nough, they're covered with the bastards instantaneously. The moment I arrive. The system works, but after a week, ten days, two fresh baggies per visit are beginning to get expensive, and there's always some fleas that go straight for the unguarded skin on my hands and my neck, y'know, anyway. Time to resort to chemicals and be done with it. So I get one of those flea bombs where you seal all the windows, stick towels under the door, newspaper in all the cracks, leave for two hours, come back and everything's dead and you air the place out and start over. I do this, I'm back and I quickly learn two things are notdead. One, the fleas, they're all over my socks (which this time are red) — whuh went wrong? The label, the can, I read it and realize the bomb was an egg bomb. Kills flea eggs and fleas that ain't YET, but fleas that are — forget it. The monsters tunnel through to my ankles, legs, feet and suck like my flesh has got straws attached.

Two, I hear this catsound, yikes, where's it coming? 'S faint. I'm thinking one more minute in this deathspice-scented air and I'll faint from just the scent (not even the death) — I've yet to open a window. Two hours — where? who? Bathroom, no, bedroom, oh no, cowering behind a curtain is CatMan, fuckme, and the look on his face is Thanks, pal, for saving me. Me, his near-killer! — what grievous shit I was, am, for assuming he'd gone out through the catdoor and sealing it, for not beating the bushes more thoroughly, for not double-triple-beating goddamit, kickme, I nearly killed a cat, this cat!, this cat like a man (among men), fucking Fuck and I carry him, speed him to the porch and stand helpless as he wobbles down the stairs, sobs and disappears into an alley. To die? Die now? But he soon returns and I offer him food (he declines) and pour water, an entire bowl of which he drinks without pause and

cats never drink more than a spoonful, spooking me, griefing me into staying the rest of the day — and all night — and his BONES STICK OUT, 12 years old and suddenly 12 catyears OLD, lying there lethargic as lint, this cat who not a month (year?) before had averaged a birdcatch a WEEK and was hearty and bold as a tuna ... I did it. Me! Or the catclock (or both), and the fleas stab and feast and I scratch and wipe blood with my sleeve and make sure he is breathing. Mid night he gets up and goes to a closet, I follow him in and say, "Don't die, I love you," and only his eyes move, and needy puny Phobia lurks about demanding to be petted, and six weeks later he's catdust.

Catfish: none.

Sea monkeys? None.

THE REVENGE OF "THEM" — I'm still waiting. 19 counts of anticide are bound to catch up with you. 19 ants — an ant farm — one of those \$9.98 plastic jobs suitable for birthdays and weddings. I was their farmer. I'd sit and watch them dig, move sand around, tho it wasn't actually sand, some kind of white talc-y sand substitute. There is no sub for interest, however, and, burrowing done, these miniworkaholics soon got bored & boring. Meaningful farmwork a thing of the past, they paced like 6-legged seniors on a geezer farm. — Where's the checkers, Jethro? — I'm tired of checkers, Zeke. Days passed and weeks and I slipped them their dose of sugarwater as required. There must be more to being or owning ants — there MUST — till finally the burden of ownership got the better of me. On an outdoor ant tour I sought and found an off-species nest, one teeming with ants TWICE the length and girth of my own, antennas outstretched like junior TVs, fierce mandibles you couldn't miss from eyeheight away. Selecting the largest — and fiercest! — I raced home and thrust him on the farm population. Common cause — stave off the invader: it'll give 'em something t' do.

Tougher and fiercer than I'd reckoned, the big fella slew 14 of my boys in the first hour, and by battle's end (VICTORY!) their ranks had shrunk from 22 to 3. The courageous survivors had at the marauding sum-bitch, tearing him asunder and I do mean asunder, removing his limbs, etc. and HEAD and scattering them as far and wide as farm dimensions allowed. That's showin' him!

Roosters? No.

Roaches? Not exactly. In '72 I was living in this okey doke apartment with the lowest cockroach count in New York; you might see a couple a week. There was one we'd see every so often, me and Ruth Honeyman, with vivid red highlights you could

hardly have mistaken for anyroach else's. Ruth named her Reddy, and every few days we'd leave her a glob of yogurt, whatever flavor Ruth might be eating, in a nook beside the bathroom sink. "It'll encourage her," said Ruth, "and I'm sure she is a her, to stay out of the kitchen." She was right. Reddy came to know and trust us, never left the bathroom, and would not flee when either of us approached. One day Ruth took a bath. Perhaps she needed it; she liked her water hot. The tub filled, she was about to jump in when a limp, bloated bugmass caught her eye. Reddy — boiled dead! A rotten way to go. Ruth, for all her animallove, had been quite the executioner, and when roachword got out, the deluge: cucarachas in every cupboard and drawer, in our books, wineglasses, bedclothes, licking the glue off envelopes and stamps. It was them or us — let the slaughter begin! — but nonpet roachkills, like fleakills, don't count, and I'm not counting PARROTS. □

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer's Navy, part 1

In which the author — former draft dodger, dope fiend, and notorious anarchist — is politely introduced to the modern military.

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[July 10, 1986](#)

Cover Stories

Navy life



We hop in her bright yellow Datsun Z, head out for 32nd Street Station, only to be stopped cold at the gate 'cause she hasn't prearranged my pass. Since Libya this is the one base (lots of ships berthed here) where civilians are treated as potential saboteurs. "C'mon!! — he's got an i.d."

- *I wish that*
- *I was born a thousand years ago;*
- *I wish that*
- *I'd sailed the darkened seas*
- *On a great big clipper ship*
- *Going from this land into that*

- *In a sailor's suit and cap.*
- —“Heroin,” The Velvet Underground

Okay. I spent five–six days with the U.S. Navy. It didn't kill me. As “mixed” an encounter as any I've had as a writer, some parts were wretched, ghastly, distressing; others, ethereal, effervescent, exhilarating. Mostly it surprised me at every turn.

I expected terror at sea and found it on land ... assumed digital–Republican would be the ticket, discovered a whole big kettle of thoroughly mixed human etc....looked forward to the 70mm remake of *10,000 Years at Sing Sing*, got a PBS documentary on life in China ... and stuff like that.

Beyond my wildest imaginings, the experience once and forever “demystified” the military for me — whatever that means.

It also left me with a mean coffee habit, the sort of thing you pick up when you can't have a beer. If this shows in my writing — never touched it before — well I'll be dog.

Okay. There's so much to tell, so much to tell. Lemme just tell the whole story.

An Officer And A Democrat

Last week of April, I'm down in S.D. from L A. After weeks of phone calls to the public affairs offices of Naval Training and Pacific Fleet/Naval Aviation I've got this nice little package of looksees set up, which I'm promised could be “more fun than Disneyland.” Since the ball first got rolling, events in Libya have colored the Navy *topical*, but topicality is perhaps the last thing I'm after. What I want to catch peeks of, as much as one can in less than a week, is the “eternal Navy” (or some such animal), nothing necessarily dramatic, just the ongoing workings of the Navy as ... the Navy.

At first they were taken aback — “Could you be more specific?” *Sure*, they could and would show me “anything,” but *what*? Finally, thank you, they came up with this dandy, convenient nutshell. I'll observe recruits at various stages of basic training, a little advanced training, then to crown it I'll see the products of this training at sea, on “America's Flagship,” the aircraft carrier *Constellation*.

My first stop: Naval Training Center—NTC. On a map it's this big huge hunk of pink west of Lindbergh Field. I drive ten minutes of perimeter just to reach the gate. Minimum security fuss, phone call and an i.d. and I'm in. Spotless grounds, grass,

occasional trees, '30s buildings, '40s buildings, '50s buildings — offices? dormitories?—like exteriors from *An Officer and a Gentleman*. Also, I realize, like the grounds at Camarillo.

On the front steps of PAO — Public Affairs Office — a seaman polishes a large brass object, the same brass *object* I will see being polished by him or others, each time I return. Inside, office life (normal). Further inside, at one of those phone things where you talk at a box, is my man, my contact, the NTC's public affairs officer. Lieutenant Barton (Bart) Buechner of Fort Wayne, Indiana. A jovial, slightly pudgy 30, Buechner — pronounce that BEEK-ner — could pass for 35. 200-watt smile, teeth quite clean; a hearty, beefy handshake. In his spiffy dress whites he reminds me of someone, something, somebody specifically Hollywood ... Dick York? Dick Sargent? Umm, let's just leave it and come back.

The thing, though, the something — the reminder is mostly generic. PR. Persons I Have Known. Folks whose literal job it is to meet the public, greet the public, charm/soothe/annoy it with phonetalk, orchestrate its perception of reality, keep it at arm's length while winking a passable simulation of *come on in*. Yep I've known them: 15 years of record company (movie company) publicists ... "media reps" for the NBA (NHL) All-Star Game (World Series)... the guy (gal) who hands you a press kit for the Renaissance Faire (or *Wrestle Mania*). On first inspection Bart is certainly no weirder than any of them, and though his smile and glad-hand are a tad more forcibly synchronized than any I've seen/shook in years, his shtick could hardly be classed as hard-sell.

Nor could mine be classed hard-buy. I'm not after concert freebies, a bar tab at some club, party invites, or a stack of LPs from the office stash. I'm not quite sure what I want, not yet; I am patient, far from greedy, eager to encounter the hand as *dealt*. As my first in-the-flesh Navy anything, Bart is it, and I sit back and groove on his homespun (corporate-spun?) earnestness. For opening chitchat he offers (believe it) the Army-Navy Game — " ... no longer exactly big-time football, but there is an excitement" — then on to the slide show.

Images, images, verbiage. One of three major training centers (map of U.S.) with Great Lakes and Orlando, the San Diego facility (old photo, black & white) dates to 1923, nearly half of its 540 acres (aerial shot, new) being landfill. 30,000 recruits a year (of most if not all races, religions), their average reading (or is it math?) grade 7 years 6 months. Basic training (several shots), advanced training ... the superiority of *our* seaforce is our boys, trained, can fix-it. "The Soviets have the volume of hardware, that's for sure, but let's say a radar installation goes bust. They haven't got the on-ship personnel to make repairs without returning to port."

Firefighting, the only slide that looks like war, black silhouettes battle flames, yellow/red. The one specialty skill *all* sailors share; the omnipresent danger, "all that fuel." (And on carriers, jet fuel.)

Mess hall, slide of plump civilians dishing out... "When did you start hiring civilians?" I ask.

"Whoops, heh, you caught it. That is out of date. I'm not exactly sure when but we discontinued — you don't want them handling food, heh, and out on a break smoking grass!"

Slide, our last, of the *USS Recruit*, mostly wood, a 2/3-scale dryland dupe of a Navy frigate. "There's an interesting story goes with this." (I should hope.) "Jimmy Carter when he was President actually commissioned it as a Navy vessel. President Reagan of course *decommissioned*..."

"Did Carter, as a former Navy man, do it to show his sense of humor?"

"On no. It was because of his deep, abiding affection for the sea ... and the men, the recruits, who man it. [Pause.] I personally *miss* Carter's policy on human rights" — oh boy, a Democrat! — "it really was a nice touch. Now Reagan, I guess, is still holding up the torch, though it doesn't *seem* to be shining quite as brightly [pause]... not as an aspect of foreign policy." Pause, pause — this baring of secrets (and chain-of-command blasphemy) has perhaps gone far enough. "Still, heh, we *have* caused trouble for a few dictators lately."

I nod, of course, and on to him picking *my* mind. "Tell me," he asks, "as a journalist, have you ever heard Louis Farrakhan speak?"

"Uh yeah, as a matter of fact. On the radio."

"And what'd you think?"

"Um, well, I kind of just listen to it as sound, the uh cadences of his ... "

"But the content — less than nothing, right? Y'know he actually the other day called on people to *support Khadafy*, can you believe it?"

"..."

"Tell me, how many people do you think would follow him on that?"

"Dunno" — wait, we journals *have* the answers — "Maybe ten thousand, less."

"Well that's good. Then there's nothing to worry about yet."

"I guess not." Nor, I could add, should we lose any sleep if he called for the torture-death of Reagan's puppy. But I'm here to straight-face it, and I grit teeth, swallow, and roll up my shirt. Revealing; tattoo, a beaut, skull-and-eagle (New York, '74).

"Say, that's nice. I know you've never been in the service" — come again? — "but that certainly looks like a seaman's tattoo."

KNOWS... I'VE NEVER BEEN ... IN THE SERVICE. Ye gods have they done their homework. / know I've never told them, not Bart, nobody on the phone ... no one. Yowser!

For *my* homework I finished a couple Joseph Conrads and the entire *Caine Mutiny*. For theirs I'm sure they checked me, they *security* checked me, and they've seen it all. The student deferments ... the graduate student deferments ... the Vietnam-era 4-F ... and the reason bloody reason I got it. But heck, they don't know it all — they don't know my military *history*.

Multi-decades in the making...

—I was 5 or maybe 6, my father's wearing these silly khaki *items*. Khaki outerwear, sleeveless khaki underwear. Khaki socks? Remnants of an honorable, meritorious tour with the fabulous, wonderful U.S. Army. In the Big One, the True One, the Best Years of Somebody's Lives, WW2. Was Korea already in flower? Dunno. World Series is on, Yankees-Dodgers (Yankecs-Giants?), and the sonofabitch makes me stand for the "Star Spangled Banner." "Our country's flag — I fought for it." Stand for the fucking radio.

— I'm 7 or 8, Dwight David Ike is the prez. Dad voted Ike ("My commander-in-chief") while Mom voted Adlai. It's Saturday, the old man takes me to *Red Badge of Courage* starring Audie Murphy. Horses, saddles, six-guns, spurs, but it can't be a western, it's in black & white. "Courage," "cowardice"; by movie's grim end I am sure I would opt for the latter. Run. Hide. Remain alive. Quick enough and you're not even shellshocked. What Ike doesn't know — please don't tell! — will not kill (or dismember) me.

Sponsored

— Summer of age 8, the Brooklyn Day Camp Bool. While others splash, thrash, *play*, I tread lonely water thinking *ten more years, that's all I've got*. No, not till they drop it, *that* big one — that could be tomorrow, the next day. In ten years I'll be entering college, the school of "my" choice, at which point I will hand my life over to Naval RQTC, something which daddy-o has in recent weeks been feeding me — w/ mustard, relish (but no bun) — the stark, dark, gut-gutting inevitability of. "You'll have to serve *somewhere*, Dick, it's better to be an officer, and the Navy is a much cleaner life." Fine, great, but how do you run from a battleship?

— Four summers onward. Camp Cayuga (sleepaway). Somebody's head rolls in Lebanon (Syria?), a bigwig of import so Ike sends the troops. Or the ships. It's in the paper a couple days and all these counselors sit around moping, brooding. Fear in their eyes — yes, even "Uncle" Larry of the Penn State eleven — these draft-age jazzbos are scared *shitless*. This is clearly not "color war," and almost as clear is my germ of a notion that the enemy (yours, mine, ours) is....the draft!

— Somewhere down the line, in an unguarded moment. Papa Meltz spills it. No, he didn't *exactly* enlist to save England from the blitz. It was more like, well, to get away from his own grouchy pop. And no, he didn't quite *battle* the Nazis. Slipped on the ice, tore a cartilage in his knee 10-11 months *before* Pearl. On the grounds of — where was that again? — Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont. Medically discharged, the cocksucker; and here I've been haunted by bloodlines, shedding my own psychic blood since close to the crib.

— So on my 18th birthday I visit the campus registrar. A mere formality: no frigging way am I going. Forget the threat of death, forget any just-versus-unjust-war b.s. (the war of the wars): I've seen quite enough combat at home, thankyou! Pushin' two decades —where're my medals, my pension? Besides, I am four-eyed, blind as a bat, and blindos serve not in the service. With much glee I write "nearsighted" in the appropriate space ... no, make that "myopia" — let the clowns go look it up!

— Time marches on, talk about unjust: Vietnam. A war featuring not only, y'know, heinous fascist bad faith 'n' warstuff, but dead guys with *glasses* — dead *American* dead guys — in war pix enough times a week so I'm losing my sleep. "No sweat," chimes my girlfriend, "you've still got that tremor" — my left hand sh-shakes — "and encephalograms to prove it." Whew, wow, that's a relief.

— The day comes, of course, when there's no longer such thing as grad school deferments. Why there ever was beats me (*I wouldn't defer 'em, would you?*), in any event I am no longer deferred. I'm 23, my hand hasn't shaken since I lost the girlfriend, Khe Sanh is the news of the hour, and frankly I'm worried. Ever the assurer, my darling ma tells me, "You'll make *lots* of friends in the Army." (Dopefiends like myself, I presume?) "It'll make a man of you." (Unlike your khaki wimp spouse?)

— My one and only draft physical. Fort Hamilton, N.Y., I forget which month. '68. Worst day of my life from any cause other than loss of love; the closest I've yet come (1986) to experiencing bottomless *non*-irrational terror. The dehumanization, the voice-suppressed terminal anguish, and, gosh, hardly just merely my own. Bused in, Dachau cattle-car style, with sixteen tons of age-coded, region-coded peers, I shudder and shake at the sheer hopelessness contorting the mugs of buddy boys I haven't seen since high school. "Spread your ass!" barks a humorless uniformed jackjoe, "Pee in the cup!" Go — *submit!* — *to your physical, emotional demine*. When panic shoots my heartbeat to a skillion point nine, this cretin with a stethoscope literally *snarls*, "Get it down, boy, or stay overnight for observation " Poor Norman Olezyk staggers from test to test, toting reams of x-rays ("My spine is ... " "*Oh shut up!*") that haven't spared him *dick*, and by midafternoon I abandon the thought that my shrink's note might save me.

— A *great* note, which I've already steamed open (and meticulously re-sealed) so I know. "Has taken LSD several times and is often incoherent. Considers himself an avant garde artist and uses fire as a means of expression." True, true — no distortion, no simulation on either his part or mine — plus another two-three single-sentence glimpses at aberrant psyche and late-'60s culture damage. Show it to the Army shrink, this is after a full day of yaaaaaaagghhhh and I'm hanging by a *thread*, and he says: "Let's suppose we take you." A red-bearded pipe smoker, he's the spittin' image — no joke — of Freud himself. On the wall is a framed portrait — I would not lie — of Freud himself. A civilian, mayhap (the beard is a giveaway), a professional healer supplementing his secular income with one day a week of military shame. So I tell him, and it couldn't be more ingenuous, more without bluff, "Well I'll cut off my toe. And if that's not enough, I'll cut off my foot." So he says, equally without guile (we make a great team): "No kidding? Really?" And I say: "C'mon, man, have you ever seen a bigger horror show?" And he says: "Okay, don't worry, you've got your 4-F."

Yeah. The last part of which — the 4-F — the Navy knows easy (it's in the Files), although how do they know I'm *that* Richard Meltzer? I've hardly, for instance, got the same address. I've seen namesakes in local and out-of-town phone books; are *all* Richard Meltzers 4-F? Or, since Bart never actually mentioned *draft* classification, have all Richard Meltzers merely not "served"?

But that's just the low range of possibility. Maybe they know *damn* sure it's me, and if so have they also maybe gone and *read my stuff*? There's 20 years of typeface to wade through — "salacious," "seditious," "provocative." In the last couple years alone I've dropped dumps on born-again Christianity, decried (post-punk) rock as the cultural ass-kiss of the ruling class, called on every man, woman, child in America to turn off their TV set (now!) and never watch the nightly news again.

Or, having read me — yet approved this assignment — have they thus officially declared me *not* a risk to the Republic?

Or will they simply be *watching me*, eyeballing every move, inspecting my hotel room while I'm out?

Or, ha, have they read not a word until now ... nor would they really care beans if they did ... but by writing THIS now I'll draw their attention, whoever it is I'm even talking about, and they'll promptly open a file on this silly geek they never knew existed?

How did I get myself into this?

Lemme get some sleep.

Smallpox And Vermouth

Perchance to be rested at 5:15, time enough to make it to NTC by a quarter to 6. A.M. An hour, even the latter, which I don't think I've been awake at in what, five years? Excepting trips to the bathroom, not since *Hepcats from Hell*, my late unlamented punk show at KPFK, had me hopping through a totally horrendous 2-6 A.M. shift. More like six years, but I ain't complaining. Lt. Buechner's lined me up a wowser: meet and greet recruits (conceivably as tired as myself) as they bid farewell to mom, dad, little sis, and board a bus for eight weeks of delightful basic training and four years, minimum, of Navy Navy Navy Navy Navy.

And ride with 'em, goody. I'm gonna ride.

But first I've gotta hook with Bart, who will take me Downtown where the fun departs. He's done this many times — "Writers enjoy it." What I'm not enjoying, however, is the first 15 minutes of standing like a dipshit at the NTC gate, peeping at drivers for the eyes of Bart. Or the next 10 — have they checked me through the night, assigned readers to my junk (and decided to cancel)? — until yay, the pastel

yellow pickup of Lieutenant B. In the same spiffy whites. I hop in, expecting a U-turn (isn't Downtown *thataway?*), but we keep on the base.

Smalltalk ensues. How I'd majored in philosophy, by accident got into writing. How he'd majored in oceanography till a Naval Academy advisor sold him on English, which prepared him for his "calling," public relations, excuse me, affairs. English, huh? — "You ever read Joseph Conrad?" "Some," he says; I don't ask for titles. "How 'bout *The Caine Mutiny*?" "Some of that too." Jack Kerouac, who himself was in the Navy at least half an hour — *no*, he's never read Kerouac. At his age I hadn't either.

And as we drive I'm still trying to place the face, the uh ... *that's it*: Martin Milner. Well a little more puffed out, with a dose of hayseed thrown in, or let's say the father from *Apple's Way*, Ronny Cox. Or a polished, handsomer, less malnourished version of Randy Quaid — send him to college — in *The Last Detail*. Okay, that's done. Then we stop at PAO, and I'm turned over to Billy Dee Williams.

A.k.a. Petty Officer Tarver, also in whites, the first enlisted man (or woman) whose hand I get to shake. Michael Tarver of L.A., the spitting image of Billy Dee, maybe a little shorter, my tour guide (apparently) for the day. Off we spin in his brand new red Nissan 300-ZX. "People think I bought this with my re-enlistment bonus," he chuckles. "Actually I've got an outside business. Electronics. I install car stereos, speedometers, I make 40-50 dollars an hour." Which is more than I'll make writing this, I think, noting with consternation that our route will no likelihood take us Downtown or even off the facility. "This is my day off, in fact" — his yawns as conspicuous as mine — "but I like to do favors for PAO." Which — we brake to a halt at the *terminus* of the morning's busings — has evidently altered my itinerary.

Drat, no, whuddo I care? What's given is given. Did Buechner (by any chance) fail to reset his alarm, misconsult the bus schedule, forget (then cover) his commissioned, be-calling'd arse? Mine not to reason. Tarver's got his typed-out list, and first on the thing is haircuts.

Whole shitloads of new arrivals stand around, pace around this concrete quadrangle, slowly but surely lining into queues for the ceremonial theft of their scalp. The first official dose of humiliation — isn't that the plan? — but what's so humiliating anymore about radical cuts? Hardly anyone here has it long; only one kid in the bunch — glasses and a Phillies T-shirt — has it even halfway to his shoulders. No discernible apprehension (like they used to show you in *Life*) about this particular stage-one rite. You think of those photos of Elvis getting clipped by the Army — sad, grim, the end of the world — and these kids by comparison don't seem to give two shits in hell. Before or after. About loss of personal mane.

Snipped, in fact, well first the whiteys — the white boys seem more *personalized*, more contempo male-of-the-species *expressive* than before they walked in. Punk, skinhead, Henry Rollins '82. In a month, six weeks they'll be Archie Andrews, Henry Aldrich. The blacks are like Marvin Hagler forgot to shave his head for a couple days; nothing wrong with that look, period.

They all seem pretty much children, hardly a face over 18, 19, and not a goddam yuppie ('cept the merest of potential) among them. Economics: I can't tell how rich or poor anyone is, everyone has more or less come in his casual best, but if you pointed a gun at me I would guess that no one is higher than *middle* middleclass. One guy's so skinny he must be 6-1, 120. A smattering of fatsos.

Shots. Tetanus, yellow fever, diphtheria, polio, measles/rubella, smallpox. Not all right now, one or two, but enough to take it a step worse than a haircut. Grimaces and winces. Asks a big guy in khakis: "Has anyone ever tested positive in a tuberculin test?" Two blacks raise their hands.

Dentist. Grimaces, smirks, but no yanking yet: they just want an x-ray. Insufficient personnel, so they've got haggard, sleepy-eyed recruits of maybe two weeks' duration holding photo plates and showing people where to stick their chin.

"Stenciling." Your new duds will need your name. So you line up and they make you a stencil. Which they use on your duds. Then you carry out the duds. (No tears here.)

Stage One. Haircut, new clothes, inoculation, cursory check ... and what else? *Confiscation*. Which I don't see firsthand, not the act, but there's this big display Tarver shows me, this ongoing thing under glass in full view of yet the latest crop of ripely potential confiscees. Compositionally speaking it's kind of nice, a visually intriguing arrangement of all the heinous, horrible funstuff that's been snatched from various poor-unsuspecting newcomers who figured they'd just "bring some in" to tide them through the rigors of boot camp. Roaches, full joints, papers, roach clips, zip-loc bags of green leafy dried vegetable matter, pills, pills and more pills, tiny vials and miniature see-through packets of powders brown and white, half a fifth of Jack Daniels, full entire bottles of Miller High Life and Corona, a partially crushed can of Bud, little itsy flight-size whiskeys and liqueurs — a fine collection you would have to admit. Like all good collections it is locked up tight; I don't see any needles or vermouth.

I do spot, however, this brownish organic-looking ... dunno ... so I ask Tarver, "What's that — *peyote*?" and he says, "Don't ask me, I don't know *anything* about drugs. I'm not the man to ask!"

A good man, that Tarver, 17 years of ambient ghetto-damage *avoidance* in his kharmic account. Was 17 when he joined, a graduate of L. A.'s Centennial High, and now he's 25 — "So all I've got is another 12 years to go." Till he's done 20 and can start collecting his pension, devote full time to his thriving biz, and still be a relative youngster of 37, three years younger than my own bones today. Nice work if you can get it, I muse (having no marketable skills, no savings; being too old for plumbing school, even most jobs at a minimum wage). "My wife and I don't plan on having kids till I'm 33 or 34," he adds, "not with all the moving around." Soon he'll be transferred to the Naval Air Station at Miramar; any lot the Navy wills him, land or sea, is just jake with him. Races motocross, "enjoys life" — one of the wholesomest persons I've met who doesn't make me instantly sick.

Touch of Equal

On Tarver's shoulder is this red rope, signifying he's a company commander. Well not currently, and possibly never again, but he has commanded three already, which is three more than Roger Maris commanded in his lifetime. A company is a preselected group of exactly 80 raw recruits who as a unit will do their eight weeks of basic together. Every Friday, 50 or so weeks a year, NTC/San Diego graduates six such companies, by then not nearly so raw but down to an average of something like 70, the remainder having been shipped home to ma, pa and/or their teenage been done; before that, recruits were assigned directly "to the fleet" for on-the-job "seasoning" and training. Which, as more than a century of same had finally clearly shown, hardly really amounted to *training* at all, not at the scale of efficiency the Navy is so famously fond of. So they opted, whatever year, for the living hell of boot camp, a system and policy — what? change *again*? — from which they haven't since substantially departed.

So they've still got companies, which have still got commanders, not to be confused with literal Commanders, commissioned officer folk figuring rankwise between Lieutenants, actually Lieutenant Commanders and Captains, themselves not to be confused with the captains of ships, i.e., commanding officers of sea units whose rank could be Lieutenant, Captain, Commander... whatever. Navy jargon for rank (and role) can be confusing — *company* commanders are specially chosen enlisted persons from any of three different ranks of *petty* officer (in ascending order: 2nd Class, 1st Class, Chief).. It's all kind of in the sergeant range, with most c.c.'s at this base being either chiefs or, like Tarver, 1st class. Each new company gets one and keeps him for the whole hellish run. The posted qualifications: "stability," "integrity," "charisma," the by-the-numbers gamut of inspirational/motivational oo-poop-a-doo. The job: to personally mold, sculpt, cajole, inveigle, browbeat, direct, run ragged, encourage, bust the hump of, "set an example" for, dehumanize and (optionally)

rehumanize each and every kiddie in one's command, with the goal of sending their certified butts to the fleet, to advanced training, etc. — *functional swabbies* now, forever, or at least the remainder of their four-year hitch.

To pull it off — says the Book — you've gotta be part macho role model, part cop, part father ("Many recruits come from broken homes"), part football coach, part lots of things except, says Tarver, "never their friend. I've had a number of black recruits, for example, come up to me during a break and try and shoot the shit, get personal with me so I'll be their buddy. But you can't be *anybody's* buddy, you can't let anyone, even in the back of their mind, expect special treatment. In fact sometimes it backfires, 'cause you have to go harder on them so no one will ever *suspect* you of favoritism."

Good, fine — equality is neat — and we saunter over to check out some equals. A group of second-day recruits, not yet a full company's worth, stand around glum and disoriented, exhausted for the day (at 7:30 A.M.) even though the real daily rigors won't be starting till the rest of their company arrives, tomorrow or the next day. Many — let's be fair — are prob'ly just beat, scared and lonely from their first night, ever, away from home (and here it is, gosh, a whole 'nother day). Self-conscious at last their new rad appearance, certainly more so than any first-day arrivals, singular or plural. I've so far observed, they avoid looking even at each other, lest they catch a flash of self-image too multiple to handle. "They need some *actual* challenges to take their mind off this stuff' — rolled-up cuffs of their Navy jeans look so-o-o hokey — "Why don't you interview some?"

Okay, but then he says that one and *that* one — of course with him standing right there. I gulp and improv some bullshit like *is this any different from what you expected? what about the discipline? how do you feel about blah blah etc. ?* and they stammer back *um uh you know*. Whudda *they* know who I am? — I could be an a-hole from Naval Intelligence — and they really do seem introverted, self-contained. Except for this one kid from Kansas, an iota less inner-directed, who offers (nearly smiling): "Whatever there is, um, I'm up for. Anything, uh, I'm sure I can do." The guy's teeth are wretched — Jesus — which makes the mere opening of his mouth a poignant reflex compensation for ... but no, insists Tarver (once we're alone), "That recruit is a *joker*. Someone will have to straighten him out." Well, yeah, there's *that* side of it — reduce him to equal humility (and I hear frat initiations are excellent "character builders" too).

I do manage to get in — hey, while we're at it — a de rigueur "How 'bout Libya?" I mean, right? But every body here enlisted *before* that biz, and they all basically shrug, "It's, uh, part of the job," although one does cop: "My *mother's* a little worried

now." (Snickers.) Tarver on the subject, soon as we're out of their earshot: "It's unfortunate some have to be there, but so far it looks pretty safe for us. We may lose some, but it should be real few " Which is pretty much what MANY will spout through the course of my week—it's a big world, a big service ... and the peacetime Navy marches on.

The Ronald McDonald Blues

Marching. Plenty of marching. And drilling. We sit in the car and watch third-week, fourth-week recruits struggle to make anything they do seem even marginally synchronized. Especially these numbers with rifles over their head — you've seen it in movies — swinging it, twirling it: this they cannot do to save their lives. "Does it ever get much better?" I ask. "Hmm " he considers, "not really." The marching, though, actually the marching's not so bad. Some companies have it, some don't; marching (I remember from Boy Scouts) is ultimately no big deal. 1-2-3-4 but it's nowhere as tough as playing drums. Just like in probably the same film, they're all chanting cadence like it's 1942.

We drive to a more strenuous area. Calisthenics in the suddenly not unhot sun. Pushups, situps, knee bends, etc., but lots more than you had to do in gym class. And the guy, the company commander is more eagle-eyed than your gym teacher. Spots a kid not lifting his tail high enough on pushups, bellows, "You may think you're in the Navy *already*, but this is just the *audition*. You can quit right now and join *Khadafy's* navy for all we care. I'm sure it's a whole lot easier." The recruit gets his tail up. Another sufferer keeps *collapsing* no matter what the exercise, but it's almost touching, the same bozo tells him. "Easy. son... you can do it." *warmly* — what for Stanislavski could easily pass as compassion.

"They're not allowed to physically abuse the recruit," points out Tarver, "time was they could but not anymore. You can't even *touch* a recruit unless it's like a demonstration in self-defense. Oh, there'll be instances, but it's pretty rigidly enforced. And you can't intimidate with abusive language." At which point a company commander, sipping Coke on a break and noticing some kid, not even one of his own, subaudibly grumbling as he puff-pants through lap eight or nine of a jog 'round the field — and it's not a small field — he yells: "Shut the fuck up! You're a motherfucking baby!" Well, as long as it's not meant to intimidate...

So I'm wondering what sort of intimidation/coercion they *do* have at their disposal for, um, actual "attitude problems." Persistent fuggups and recalcitrants. "Well, there's the 'short tour' " — four hours of jumping jacks w/ rifles. Let's go. A couple fields over, five or six arm-weary fuggups, guns barely at their navels, hunch their

shoulders and hop, bounce or stretch off the balls of their shoes. No sync between them of any kind; a sort of nonperiodic constancy their only rhythm or pulse. Some drop out, skip a few, jump back in with implied vengeance. "See — they're showing they aren't quitters." Looks about a third to a half as grueling as Richard Gere's torture scene in *Officer and a Gent*.

Which brings us to breakfast — and the land of salutes. Thus far we've either been among brand newbies who haven't gotten their chain-of-command lecture yet or in Tarver's car where he hasn't been wearing his hat, so the only salutes he's had to return have been mistakes. Once you go from E-1 to E-2, from seaman recruit to seaman apprentice, you no longer salute anyone under O-1 (ensign), i.e., just officers, the fully commissioned kind. At boot camp, though, to get in the swing of arm-jerk respect for authority, you salute anyone with the red rope as well. Tarver, E-6 with a rope, is thus entitled to the whole merry hand-to-brow "Good morning, sir" routine — except, that is, when without his hat, his "cover." "I really shouldn't [hatless] return their salute, but it's a shame to discourage them just when they're getting in the habit."

As we step to the mess hall the salutes come in bunches, and each is returned with a civil, nonironic "As you were, recruit." Inside, the first sense datum is the familiar smell of an overscrubbed school cafeteria, food stink and mop stink at equal bouquet. Second, the neopenal modular look of same. An update of places where teenagers ate. Soggy toast, eggy eggs, mini-boxes of cornflakes and shredded wheat. Whole tablefuls gorge themselves — "Many come from homes that couldn't afford full breakfasts. And after a morning's workout anything tastes great." *How's the food?* I'm pressured to ask; *um yeah y 'know*, the reply. A sullen recruit hauls garbage; he contends as jobs go he's "done worse " "You don't wanna eat *here?*" ventures Tarver — "Let's go to McDonald's."

And I'll be dipped if there isn't one right on base, a recent funtime addition to the officers-only putting green and *classic* circa '58 bowling alley. As it's still very much A.M. menu time, a sprinkling of sailorboys, their thatch-work too lengthy for mere recruits, can be seen a-chomping on Egg and/or Sausage McMuffs. "Recruits would never be here this early, no way, and since they're fed in the galley" — *whoops*, he spills grape jelly on his sno-white trousers — "there's no actual reason for them to be here at all. *Damn*" — wipes at the spot with a napkin — "it's a good thing I've got seven more pairs of these, they're rarely good for more than a day. Anyway, once in a while, like if they're out on some detail and miss a meal, we'll send over here to get 'em something. They need the energy, it's important they get three meals a day." (Thanks, Ronald, for finally contributing to *something*.)

Postcards of Heck

The place, the space, where recruit dreams are dreamt of not only Big Macs, Quarter Pounders, but the hot 'n' juicy goodthings they will do with their own quarter-pounders, boot camp, on exotic, distant shores. Barracks, Jack: double tiers of extremely made beds. You want an antonym for "pigsty," it's something quite like this. Competitions rage for which company's quarters are the most unsoiled, the most immaculate, the most bloody, flaming orderly under God's green sun. Everything's so beyond-life antiseptic you could eat off — well / wouldn't eat off the floor, but I'd feel pretty safe having open heart surgery on it. As we wander through, Tarver spots this sock, this goddam sock, that's not stashed exactly where it SHOULD BE. "Recruit — where does this belong?" Color alone is no clue, so think for a sec. Recruit, mortified, removes it from undies shelf, stacks it with sweatsox. (And you thought mommy made you neurotic.) On the whitest wall outside a hospital, stenciled in blue, the Order of the Universe, chain of cheeses for good little sailors and bad: Pres. Reagan ...VP Bush... Defense Sec. Weinberger ... Navy Sec. Lehman ... Chief of Um-Uh Soandso... Admiral Whatsisface ... (memorize en route to the crapper)... down to the localest bit player. Dig, recruit: your home and hearth for two joyous months. The sole entire that which where, between taps at 9:30 and reveille at 3:30 or 4:00, you will think, speak, whisper and dream of the good, the true, the who your gal is fucking back in Squodunk, Portland, or N.Y.C.

All of which rolls over me in waves; a rush. That I haven't felt such misery-by-osmosis since, well ...since those teevee pictures of kiddies in Libya with their eyes blown out.

A morning's journalism has evidently *gotten to me*.

Or hey, calm down. Too soon to panic. Ponder, consider: weren't some, many, nearly all dorm nights of my own college knowing rather, how you say ... uniformly bleak? Yeah, no question. So maybe it's this memory, the uh sympathetic vibration is feeding back and messing with my so-called objective eye for ... y'know ... no question there either. And high school — God, *high school!* — is any of this truly more than let's say 3 or 4 (5 or 6) times worse than my recollected worst-case parameters of h.s. experience? Again no, and ditto for home life, and even if we're in the range of 10 times worse (or even 20) that's still hardly a quantum leap from my sense of the known and the knowable. The underlying torment, desolation of it all. So like shut up, this is *extremely* familiar Woe Turf; it's endurable.

And as I'm thinking this I spot a true-blue sight for sore eyes, FRESHLY WASHED SAILOR CAPS DANGLING ON THE LINE -nothing (in context) could be luvlier.

"They wash them every day," volunteers Tarver, totally unaware of my hysteria, and we split for a classroom and a swimming pool.

In the room there's some math going on, female instructor, remedial math or something. As if their physical/emotional snakepit weren't brutal enough, there's still academic scores they must pull off to qualify. In this class, though, the only real pulling is they're pulling on her crank; a genuine breach of order & obedience. Minimal attention paid, they yak out of turn and/or context — just like high school. Tarver shakes his head ("She should be asserting more discipline"), but, c'mon, they've already got discipline up the old wazoo. not all forms of which are interchangeable. Most have recently *escaped* the classroom — or so they thought — and here they're stuck having to suck back into it. Where else in this pressure pot would you 'spect them to let out some steam — human biology "having its way" — even if just by the thimbleful? And besides, teach is a woman (mommy!), nobody's been to a shrink and it's maybe a tall order at this stage of the game for *non-officers-in-training* to be modular gentlemen.

The poolside setup is so polar opposite it's eerie. Like a gym class — one place where *nobody* pays attention—that's paying attention. Supreme attention. "Yes sir! No sir!" on masse. Two companies, two company commanders, one black, one white; the white guy's running it. Lifejacket training. "You do this wrong and you die, you'll be food for sharks." A chubby black kid, uneasy in spite of his jacket, plunges feet first off a 30-foot platform ... sploosh ... he floats ... applause. Now the hard part: *non-jacket* flotation. Like say your ship sinks but there's no time for jackets. "First fold your cover" (the instructor demonstrates), stick it in your pocket — this is before you jump — then button your collar and cuffs. Look out for fires and debris, jump, take out your cover, unfold it, invert it like so and — WOW!—an air pocket. Which keeps you buoyant long enough to get your bearings and — listen to this — *blow air into your shirt*.

You learn something new every day.

Like for instance how fear-and-trembly Navy rules can sometimes make a MAN — even when no one is lookin'.

This is after — it's the last part of *this* part of the story — after we've exited the pool and walked past these guys with brooms sitting, moaning, "I'm tired ... I'm tired." Two recruits on their ass, a potential disgrace to the service. Tarver does a double-take — is this for real? — goes over, comes back embarrassed, they're still on their asses complaining. "I left them alone because, well, it's obvious they're not making it. They know they're going home, I know they're going home — so why rub it in?" Indeed.

Which is where Tarver wins my heart — an authentic man of mercy — and I neither tease him nor scorn him when he passes on buying me postcards. At the PX, I want some Navy cards — who wouldn't? — but turns out civilians can't shop there for military personnel only, tax-free or some such baloney, and it wouldn't be "kosher" for us to fake it. Like if I gave him the money, nodded at my favorite shots of anchors at sunset, split and circled the building before collecting the booty — that would just be, ugh, *circumventing* ... and Tarver will not be a party.

Buechner, though, he's cool. It's got to be exact change, and he looks in all nine directions before slipping me the package, but as purchasing agents go he's the *tops*. [And I hope this revelation costs him no dandy promotions.]

Tuesday Night Yoga Class

Another day, the same old bleary-eyed writer. Further from daybreak this time, a 7 A.M. hookup, but wise to Buechner I bust less ass and show up at 7:07. Little do I know that 7:00, on the dot, is the bloke's standard time of arrival (it's only 6:00 or thereabouts that'll cause him these problems), and a punctual Bart greets me with the wag of a Finger. Egg, if I'd eaten, would be on my face, but let's get to it: a dose of advanced training to supplement my snootful of basic.

My guide for the morning is Master Chief Brown. A *real* nice person, they seem to keep getting nicer, but since there ain't too many familiar act-faces that're black, female and 48, I can't rightly say who could play her. It's funny; in the whole Navy there really aren't *that* many blacks. The official stats say 13%, in the three companies I bothered to count yesterday the number in each was no higher than 8 out of 80, I have no idea what the breakdown is among Navy women in general, or among master chiefs (at E-9 the highest enlisted rank) — but black female master chiefs, c'mon now. I know I don't work for a great metropolitan daily. Nor have I been nominated for a Pulitzer. But give me two blacks in two days, one a female master chief with *31 years of Navy experience*, and I've gotta be able to add one and one and realize I'm being set up. To do a yes-we-hire-minorities puff piece (gad! pshaw!); I take back what I said about no worse than record or movie PR.

It's a good thing I'm so good-natured, and that MC Brown is so incredibly generous with her time. She takes me to I dunno, *dozens* of training schools, all these busy buildings featuring state-of-the-Navy (and presumably -the-art) instruction in you name it. It isn't till we're almost done that I catch wind of exactly *how* generous she's been, for it much has been truly *her* time. Like Tarver the day before, she's off, on leave, but the kicker is it's possibly her FINAL leave — she's retiring from the Navy in two months. On top of which (this is too much) it's also her MOVING DAY. As we

make stop after stop her worldly possessions are being carted, hauled, without her supervision, to a new address in El Cajon. *This is how they reward meritorious employment?*

Oh, right, there's more. We go to ice cream dispenser repair school, we go to where you learn to operate one-way intercoms for admirals, but nowhere on her list is the very school she operates. The so-called Jobs School. She's its Director. I realize, after she explains it, that it's not exactly "advanced" training, it's for bringing post-boot camp academic marginals up to snuff, but for chrissakes it's valuable and it's *hers*. Can't they let her show the damn thing off? A Navyperson's Navyperson, she voices not a peep of regret. Again like Tarver, she asserts she likes "to do things for PAO."

For which I thank her. She takes me to whole heaps of interesting places, each with its own distinct internal show-and-tell. The characters running them are *something else* — whackos, cliches, down-homes, mad geniuses of trial and error — my first concrete evidence that the Navy (as dealt to ITSELF) is more variform, polychromatic and anthropoflakey than any digital master-printout/readout I've with humanism aforethought geared myself to expect. Here, anyway, inside the microcosm of Service School Command, the difference between each module and the next is probably as perceptible, say, as that between baseball and soccer. Or, since this is schools, UCLA and Texas Tech, or a Berlitz course in Flemish and Tuesday night yoga class.

The paint jobs are different, the wall graphics and display cases, the hours in session, classroom densities and geometries of seating. Some have civilian instructors (or farm out for civilian services), others don't. The underlying cause of certain of these diffs is no doubt economic, and more than once I'm "appealed to" (my pen being so mighty) to write against budget cuts that might jeopardize this or that cozy corner of et cetera. All things being equal, the relative prosperity of any educational program is directly proportional to its urgency to the fleet. Everybody eats, but the need for meals to be *that* good is not on a par with that of radar, radios, teletype machines to be PERFECT. Maybe master-program central simply doesn't generate its digits *symmetrically*, but Mess Management School seems less lavishly accoutered than Radio Maintenance. For instance.

But even all *this* being equal, the wide range in service-school *persona* is probably most attributable to the individual muhfufs in immediate charge. Like I said, these folks are CHARACTERS. If I tell you 'bout two I might as well tell you 'bout 20, so I'll tell you 'bout one. Commander Volk, the bossman of teletype: a gone hepster in spite of himself. If you ever saw *Operation Mad Ball*, a not-half-bad Army pic with

Ernie Kovacs (his greatest role), well Cdr. Volk is that Ernie. The eyebrows, the mustache, the itchy, twitchy, unabashed ... Emieness. And I don't mean he twitches. He's got this trophy case the size of your block, shows me (with NO irony) his school's bowling shit, its bloodmobile certificates, its letter of thanks from Jim Garner for sending him students for some TV film. It is CLASSIC show-and-tell — any genre — and my toughest straightface assignment since my sister's wedding, 1969.

The students I'm shown are also a gas. They knew I was coming so they picked out The Best, their crème de la overachievement. Like this smoothy at Electronics, a yuppie in the making, who flat out exclaims: "I'm only here so I can work for IBM when I get out." And the top learner at Machine Repair, this 31-year-old Rosy-the-Riveter who joined the Navy last November "so I could learn to do something with my hands." Before that she sang country-western. When later I tell PAO about these marvels, they tease me about soft-peddling the smoothy (but Rosy they can dig). Average age through the entire system is 20-22, with a few diehards up in their 50s.

When Master Chief Brown herself joined in '55, the main thrust of job ops for women was "nursing and secretarial — neither of which particularly appealed to me." She found her niche in supplies, for years (pre-Jobs School) engaged in it royally, and as we trudge along she mock-calmly checks her watch to estimate what stage the movers're up to. A pro like I cannot believe, she shrugs off my suggestion that we cut things short (do I *really* need to visit A-C/Refrigeration?). "People are expecting us," she insists — and so they are. The Libyan "deed," if it was even half as coordinated as this, must've been like shooting fish in a barrel.

Crust And Lust And Hippies

Finally, the final expecter. Brown's tour-guide relief, the perky, diminutive Nancy Avila, who conceivably could double for tennis pro Rosie Casals. Female, commissioned, and seemingly Hispanic, Lt. Avila is less a ringer than one might suspect: she's Assistant C.O. for Service School Command. She's also the least out-of-the-book ossifer (of any sex) I will meet, and the first I can actually speak to w/out straight facade. I mention I've done a pamphlet on ugly suburban homes with over-manicured lawns; she tells me I should come and groove on her weeds. A cool (yet feisty) customer, she seems at home both in and with the Navy in a manner more authentically healthy than you generally see with operatives in any corporate empire. It's a job and she does it, from the looks of things exceptionally well. Yet I can't imagine her (very often) surrendering her sanity or her soul.

"Been to sea?" I ask.

"No, and I hope I never have to. I'm 30, and I'd be competing with 25-year-old *ensigns*, for crying out loud, who'd have seniority [women having only recently been assigned to even noncombat vessels] just because they're men."

We hop in her bright yellow Datsun Z from before they changed to Nissan and head out for 32nd Street Station; so far it's all been NTC. Welding School our destination, and the lunchtime break looming large, we ride like the wind, only to be stopped cold at the gate 'cause she hasn't prearranged my pass. Entry's no problem for her — she's milit'ry — but since Libya this is the one base (lots of ships berthed here) where civilians (even those with on-base gigs) are treated as potential saboteurs. "C'mon!! — he's got an i.d." — love her take-no-shit attitude! — but we've gotta get the proper credentials. Twenty minutes (and three unconventional U-turns) later, we're inside the joint. I spot a couple battleships —cruisers? — destroyers? — whuddo I know? The place could be, maybe even has been, the crusty-lusty set for many a WW2 (or WW1) sea-stravaganza. It reeks nautical, it reeks gritty, it reeks *old*. Nice place.

The welders, unfortunately, have broken for lunch, but that doesn't stop Lt. Wright, a tighter, more constipated version of Cdr. Volk, from handing me a fresh pair of goggles. Nice pair; maybe we'll stay for some torches and welds. In the meantime he lectures me through. Non-nuclear welding; nuclear welding; welds that require x-rays to check the exactness of; 3-4 injuries a week; civilian instructors, yes, but 14 of 17 are formerly military. Great, thanks, wish we could stay but I'm bushed and I'm hungry. I hand him his goggles, we zoom back to base for my meal.

Which could be *our* meal, mine and the lieutenant's, only she skips 'em whenever it's feasible. "I used to be overweight, like 50 *pounds* overweight, so I eat one meal, max, and sometimes I even skip that." I select ribs, string beans, potatoes au gratin, Manhattan fish chowder, cake w/ pink sauce. Coke from a machine (no ice). Most recruits — we're back in recruitland — grab a milk. The ribs chew like rubber bands, the chowder's hot water with tomato bits and flakes of fishy fishflesh, but all in all a passable cafeteria eat. Enough calories for a while. I'd give it a C-minus.

As I'm finishing I stare around; nothing looks more recent than 1959. I double-check ... *nothing*. "I've been on the road," I tell her, "with crazy idiot rock bands. I've written about hippies in the jungles of India. I've covered hockey games in Quebec where I was the only English-speaking person in the house. But I've never worked on a story where I've felt as strange, seen anything quite as alien to my current experience, as I do with *this*."

She, relating, says, "I can imagine. I wonder what sort of thing would seem that alien to *me*. The Russian navy? Hmm, I dunno. I'm an officer, I know the ropes, could the *structure* of it be that different?"

Officerhood. The area we're sitting is marked E-7 OR ABOVE. Guest officers from who knows what foreign navy (Saudi Arabia? Portugal?) sit two tables over. We're a good ways from the nearest enlisted mammal. "Um, how do you feel as an officer," I work up the gumption to ask, "compared uh, to enlisted..."

"I feel superior. I have to admit I do."

"Yeah" — if I'd listened to my father, taken ROTC, possibly I would too. "But d'you think maybe it has more to do with *prior* stuff, the fact that you went to college, say, than any distinctions on this side of the fence, the way it just happens to be *defined*, labor/management, chain of command and all of that?"

"Well sure. College does make you more well-rounded."

"D'you go to the Naval Academy?"

"No-o-o. LSU. I got a BA in phys ed. Couldn't see myself as a gym teacher, ha. so I went into OCS."

Right. It feels more like '59 than the previous time I thought it. Small wonder — "Theme from *A Summer Place*" is on the PA. Wholesome music for wholesome working folks. (You could look up the date).

Moon Over My Acne

Later, that night, it gets earlier. How much I'm not sure, but *back* there. 1953, '54? Somewhere during Ike's first term. I keep expecting June Allyson or Jimmy Stewart to step out. Van Johnson. It's a little too primordial for Doris Day. no, actually she'd fit in perfect. But before she did racy "double entendre" films or worked with Hitchcock. Somewhere — in all literal, possible, replayable ways — before rock and roll, before football was the national sport, before they ran nipple in tit mags.

In the parking lot outside RTC at NTC, the license plates read Texas. Kentucky, Colorado — otherwise it's all California. Many Cal plates might be rental cars; "courtesy vans" from local hotels arrive, unload, depart to repeat the cycle. Families, two-three-even-four generations' worth, are here for fond reunion with their teens.

Tomorrow, Friday, those recruits who will graduate will, and relations who both give a hoot and can swing a day off will be 'round to help them celebrate. Those that give a hoot, miss their sonnyboy a little extra, and can swing one and a half or two will at any moment enter Recruit Training Command Auditorium for an "old-fashioned" USO-sponsored whatsit, and afterwards embrace and kiss their young'uns whom they have not seen in 8 long weeks. I am told by PAO that to take this in will be "heartwarming, eye-opening."

On the steps a flattop in seersucker, mid-40s. says to possibly his brother, "Don't the wheels turn? 23 years ago this was me." Young sailor on duty tells a pink-haired granny. "Come on in, we have refreshments, nachos. I can't wait to get 'em myself." Teen girl, the future queen of her town's lone sody shop, to an age peer in training bra: "Oooh... smells like an old oaken schoolhouse!" She would know.

To me. inside, it smells of moms — stinks of 'em. The world as it would be if Caution (as Culture) ran the show. The nacho party, down the hall in an oaken drawing room, is crowded, or threatens to be crowded, but you'd lie if you called it festive. Unit families attempt to engage others of their kind — with mixed results. Chips, some drenched in generic velveeta, others handy for dipping in that age-old favorite, sour cream 'n' powdered onion, do not exactly abound — there's some *bowls* of 'em. Soda and sandwiches available (in coin-op machines). The Navy, even in tandem with the mighty USO, cannot spring for everything, but balloons and streamers — sky's the limit. Imagine the worst party you have ever been at... then subtract the alcohol. (If I free-associate TUPPERWARE, don't scream.)

All partied out, I hit the auditorium. Recruits as ushers; I speak to a few.

Volunteers, they're doing this 'cause family isn't coming — so why not be an angel for the USO? Angelic, they're like kids fresh from Confession. Spent, at verifiable emotional peace, they've made it out of boot camp with their innocence (but I can't vouch for their non-innocence) unscathed. Hatless, indomitably, vulnerably Caucasian, each has got a tan line which ends where his hat would've been.

"This is the first thing I've ever really ... accomplished," says one with an *intense* case of acne. Following graduation, 48 hrs. of liberty; is he looking forward to perhaps getting drunk (and, I might add but don't, getting laid)? "Naw, I don't *do* that stuff. I just wanna have fun, play my guitar." Another, better complexion, 18-going-on-15, whose parents in Florida work (so he understands): "Hell, I joined up to get away from home!" (Truth, sour grapes, or big-boys-don't-cry?)

The room fills, I spot at most five black families, a group of Polynesians takes the whole row in front of me. Capt. Dana French, C.O. for Recruit Training, speaks of haircuts, pride, "transformation, not change," how he wishes his own teen sons would "learn to make their bunks." Hoo hee, the gang loves it, and this is just the warmup. "Possibly some of you have been entertained by Bob Hope overseas, please raise your hands" — etc., etc. — "and then there is the USO's famed 'Sunshine Lady.' I give you Cathy Elkin."

Out walks an older version of Jackie Joseph from the original *Little Shop of Horrors*. Described in *All Hands* ("The Magazine of the U.S. Navy") as an update — and then some — of the USO's "little old lady with a doughnut," the "38-year-old" (yes, she probably once was) Elkin is if anything the whitebread update of Borscht Belt detritus that couldn't have played the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Or Kathryn Crosby (with a swarm of bees in her pants) as a comedian. Or a public-access parody of a hyperactive blind date. Banal jokes, lame gestures, pleas for money more pathetic than a telethon for dandruff. And they love it, they LOVE IT — you don't come out from Tulsa not to have yourself a *time*.

For her finale Ms. Sunshine calls on her heaviest stock-in-trade, a choreographed "surprise" which even if *All Hands* hadn't cued me I'd've spotted a mile away. "Probably the neatest thing she does," goes a quote in the piece, "is getting the parents of one of the recruits down in front and having their son sneak up behind them to present his mother with a corsage." A couple from Oil City, PA — "where they had to shovel snow this morning to get here" — are selected to receive a pass for preferred seating at graduation. Hot dawg, and as they stride stageward *who's that behind them?* — why it's little Ralph! Who hands mom a box, she discreetly hugs him, dad shakes his hand — stiffly — and no more. The box unopened (could it house a snake?), they exit to the roar of warmed hearts.

Word at last is given, and visitors fan out through axled doors. Beyond this one, company x, beyond that one, company y. Find your boy before his bedtime... now!

In moonlit courtyards and alcoves, slightly too dark for the trip to be effective, finders find and seekers seek. Each recruit holds a red carnation; one, unsought, hands his to somebody's sis. "I've got a *boyfriend* back home but... thank you" he receives a peck, dry, on the cheek and a hug, friendly. A lucky guy (and I'm sure he knows it), he's gotten as much as most recruits with. With actual visiting loved ones — why here go some now. Mom: hug 'n' peck. Dad: firm handshake. Sis: tired smile. I rotate 90 degrees, another heartwarming reunion: hug (no peck), handshake, no siblings present. I rotate again, seeking a "balanced" picture. Seeing only more of same I wander, perchance to... whoops, *more* of same. Impassivesville incarnate.

Over 5-10 minutes I see no displays (none) of excessive parent-son affection, no outward signs of even "reasonable" quanta of maternal/paternal love.

But so far I haven't been *listening*, merely scanning for conspicuous rapture, evidence (immediate, visual) of the much-vaunted wow-ness of our national treasure. The American Family. Perhaps if I went for some audio...

"I've had so many shots I was sick 6 weeks out of 8." "Aw, you never did like shots." "That's not true... well, *yeah*." "I thought you'd've lost more weight." "You can't do everything."

"Did you bring my catcher's mitt?"

"Sandra, did *you*?" "No, I guess we forgot it. When're you going to have time to play softball anyway?"

"Baseball." "Baseball."

"You really look *bitchen* in that uniform." "Kenny, don't *use* that word!" "I didn't say 'bitch,' I said 'bitchen.' I bet Steven uses all *sorts* of great words." "You don't, Steven, do you?" "Ma ..." "We are proud of you, though."

And so on; had enough? Look, I'm not even putting down cornpone — cornpone with *viscera* is great. These are petty *summer camp* interchanges, in no way befitting the scale of disorder anyone's been through: kids, parents, anyone. But the kids ain't directing this show. Nor are these the "broken" families. Those, with various day-laborers, stayed home. Basically, what I see, hear, and feel is an avoidance of closeness from above, kids being business-as-usual'd at their *supreme* moment of hard burning NEED. (Somebody's gotta love 'em, gush all over them, besides the NAVY.)

For *absolute* verification (that this is indeed going on), I suppose I could wander till closing time or draw *closer*, feign charm & neutrality while staring 'em straight in the eye, but that much of a journalist I am not. Even at its most benign, the parents-of-big-boys-don't-gush chapter of Martin Mull's *History of White People in America* is unendurably grim. The parents of goddam SHOGUNS would wear their insulation thinner, or insert more juice in the *ritual* — or maybe, simply, there's nothing inside. And I'm just an outsider: think of the payoff these 8-wccks-weary, beat-to-shit offspring ain't getting. The kid from Florida, the one without the pus face, might just have known what he was escaping. And the rest of his cohorts ... *Christ*, who knows?

I escape this fuckfarm and drive. The moon is full and I'm howling.

The Triumph of Stallone

And by sun I return for the capper. Graduation. Preble Field, NTC; bleacher seating. *Triumph of the Will* in sno-white leggings.

Featuring: the RTC Crack Rifle Team and its 10-lb. World War I Springfields; the 50-State Flag Team and its flags (the size of a bam) of all 50; nonstop sonic interruption by commercial jets on the Lindbergh Field takeoff path (directly overhead).

Bigwigs in attendance: a couple of admirals, one the base commander; C.O. French; special guest W.H. Plackett, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, SENIOR ENLISTED PERSON OF THE WHOLE DANG

SHEBANG (joined 1956). Their chests laden with medals, you can actually hear the jingle, takeoffs permitting, as they strut by in review.

A cannon is fired, a baby cries. Bleacher neighbors stare *daggers* — shut that brat up!

The invocation (prayer). Heads bow as *one*. Church and state: a TEAM. The flag salutes which follow are not quite as instantaneous, as micro-synchronized, but the oompah version of "Star Spangled Banner" does have a Reichish ring to it. "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean," which fm hearing for the first time since grade school, brings an actual *chill*: music (or is it infantile sociology?) does have its latent martial potency.

Back to the infant, he or she is by now *wailing*, inconsolable. He or she is removed to the back of the bleachers. (In the land of the Free, the home of the Brave.)

"Anchors Aweigh": I try to be tingled. it fails. So much for martial — I must've heard it in the last 20 years.

A bugler, each time he's finished, does weird formal things with his mouthpiece. Removes it, *does things* with it. A five-year-old near where the crybabe was asks, "What's he doing with...?" — slap! — slam! — stilled cries. (For amber waves of grain!)

"During these ceremonies," cracks the crackling PA. "sometimes a recruit will faint. This is due to [inaudible]. Be assured adequate medical attention will be [inaudible] ambulance [inaudible] field." And no one even *giggles*.

"Officers, pree-zent swords!" shouts the drillmaster recruit. Sounds of swordsnap, then the covering whoosh of aircraft. Pause, it passes, "Officers, *carry* swords!" Kr-r-r-razy playtime! These kids must be having their second preadolescence! The leggings, the boots, the uniform spiff — I can remember, 30 years back, when even cop uniforms looked enticing. Second preadolescence: I like it. Maybe I'll buy a dartboard ... play stickball... build a treehouse... start a STAMP COLLECTION.

Lecture time, one of the admirals. Commander of some piece of a fleet. "Each man in the Navy counts." Great, okay — towards what end? "The competition in the coming years will be intense. And I don't mean rivalry between seamen, I mean the Soviets and *others* who are out there." Yeah, right, *Arabs* — so? "So whether you serve the Navy for four years or forty years, you owe it to yourself and your country to... [the usual]

What's not usual, though, is two of the bigwigs. Capt. French, he's usual, this is his command, but what's less than standard is his background. In June '55, upon graduating high school, DP. French *enlisted*. He did gangbusters, got sent to Academy Prep, then the Academy, got commissioned, served in Vietnam, etc., etc. — and here he is C.O. of a boot camp. My oh my, the world turns. He's probably at every graduation. Plackett, meanwhile, the one who while senior is still just enlisted, I can't imagine makes a habit of attending these. Or maybe he does. Whatever. The point is, both of 'em here, what a message! This could be you!

Yes, recruit, in 30 years this could be YOU, commissioned, or YOU, rubbing elbows with a pair of admirals, shooting some holes at the officers-only putting green. Which is fine, cool, for Messrs. French and Plackett — the one-in-a-zillion shots — but for these kids standing stiff in the sun, deservedly proud of their having endured *eight* weeks of it... for shame! How dare you yank these kids' puds like that? You own their *lives*, they're less than fodder, if they ever didn't call you "sir" their ass would be glass in a brig somewhere. If most of them even *dreamed* they were you they'd wake up as guilted out as if they'd wet the sheets dreaming of poking your wife. They truly KNOW the score, for at least four years you own them — so don't run 'em messages counter to their LEAST NAIVE instincts. (Are some horrors I'm thinking.)

The rite ends, appropriately enough, with a martial arrangement of the theme from *Rocky*. Underlings win! Yay yay hey! And you probably thought *Rambo* was the zenith of Stallone's military influence.

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The Lowest Form Of Literature

Author

Publish Date

[Oct. 6, 2005](#)

Musician Interviews

I was a paid musician, on and off, for 35 years. My first paid job was a high school dance. Probably the first several jobs were high schools. I was 15. By the time I was 16 the band I was in had been banned from Grant High School in Fox Lake, Illinois, for several bits of showmanship. Our guitar player stripped naked and wrapped himself in the American flag at stage right. This inspired our keyboard player to execute high volume slides on his Hammond BIII with such wired verve and abandon that he stripped the plastic off of several keys. As a result he cut his hands and wrists on the broken edges, washing two octaves of fake ivory (he had done this before and

had keys replaced) with blood, then passed out. Our singer hit a local greaser named Bozo over the head with a microphone stand, sending him to the hospital. The drummer and I had taken only a reasonable handful of Desoxyn pills and maintained a professional-sounding rhythm section.

We played a lot of bars (that overlooked my age) and then colleges. In Champagne and Carbondale, Illinois; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Madison, Wisconsin, I started to read rock magazines.

I read other people's copies of *Creem*, *Crawdaddy!*, *Hit Parader*, and *Rolling Stone*. Someone had British magazines like *Melody Maker* and others, the odd copy of *Cashbox* or *Billboard*, and later, *The Village Voice*, where Robert Christgau and Lester Bangs would appear. I didn't take note of bylines until those guys. Rock and roll and the printed word were different deals. For a long time I assumed Greil Marcus was probably an Oxford professor who may have indulged in reefer back in the 1920s, and this explained why I didn't understand him. I didn't understand Christgau because I was too stoned.

Decades later I stand in front of the magazine rack at Borders looking at the rock press display, and it's a sea of full color, glossy, mostly corporate (in one way or another) organs of promotion. Advertisements literally fall from them and flutter to your feet.

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I bought three for nearly \$30. One was *Spin* because I'd read it years ago and it had survived and two others because of their complete foreignness. I recognized no writers and little of what they wrote about.

Undoubtedly this is because I'm old. And while the stuff is foreign, it should not be alien. It's not as if I spent my youth in a neurasthenic shell at MIT. Why do I feel like I'm reading the irrational and illiterate street-jargon and clique-speak ramblings of the schiz-affected autistic, the media *cafard* mutterings of MTV comatose consumers, or the incoherent Tourette outbursts of short-circuited inmates?

SPIN

"Books That Kill," by Kyle Anderson: "Twenty-one-year-old Natalie Riedman is a proud University of Nebraska graduate, a future doctor, and a runner-up for Miss Nebraska USA. But for the rest of her life she'll be known as 'The Hot Tutor,' her official title on NBC's new reality series *Tommy Lee Goes to College* in which the

Mötley Crüe drummer does his best to focus on his homework instead of all those undergrad girls, girls, girls."

"Howling at the Moon" by Chuck Klosterman, in which he writes about bands with the word "wolf" in their names (i.e. "Wolf Parade, Guitar Wolf, Super Wolf, Wolf Eyes, Wolf Mother, Peanut Butter Wolf," etc.). He prefaces his essay: "I am trying to view these wolf bands through the eyes of a sociologist; this is not easy, as I don't know anything about sociology."

He goes on: "People who like music have wasted a chunk of their lives thinking up names for bands that do not exist." True, but redeemed for all of us by George Carlin, who once thanked fictional bands that opened for his act, among them, "The Note Fuckers" and "Waitress Sweat."

FUTURE MUSIC (UK edition)

I am trying to view this magazine through the eyes of a cyberneticist; this is not easy, as I don't know anything about cybernetics. "Cybernetics: n: the science of communication and control in animals (as by the nervous system) and in machines (as by computers)." -- *Oxford American Dictionary*.

"Reviews: Apple Logic Pro 7.1." Random sample: "WaveBurner (Pro only). Although we were very pleased to see WaveBurner included with version 7, in practice its lack of plug-in manager meant that it could take up to five minutes to open. WaveBurner 1.1, which is included, but a separate application to Logic, has a plug-in manager similar to that found in Logic, GarageBand 2, and Tiger.

"However, given the big fanfare for OS 10.4 (Tiger), it is strange that this gets little mention in the Logic 7.1 upgrade. Hopefully there should be at least slight performance improvements over Panther. We hope the new editions in Tiger that filter through to Logic 7.1 will include the 64-bit audio file format and audio device aggregation."

On page 155, this critical work caught my eye, as it would anyone who was once young, coursing with hormones, and rebellious: "Expansion's 8-Bit Kit Expansion Pack for BFD." A discourse on previous incarnations of BFD -- whatever that is (aside from Big Fucking Deal) -- is concluded happily by this remarkable statement: "This meant that for the first time we could close our eyes and it felt like there really was a real live drummer in the room with us." For the first time. Remarkable. Future music.

And nothing says sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll like writer TJ Glover's announcement: "A stripdown of the Halion 3 engine marks Steinberg's entry into the ROMpler market. What we have here is essentially Steinberg's equivalent of IK Multimedia's SampleTank and Native Instruments' trio of licensable sample playback engines -- Kontakt Player, Kompakt, and Intakt. The idea is that sample producers license the HALion player engine and fill it with their own sounds so Steinberg make [sic] a bit of cash."

AP: ALTERNATIVE PRESS

The Transplants are on the cover with a quote from one of them bannered, "People ain't gonna know what hit 'em." The feature begins, "They're a veritable rogue's gallery of rockers, with celebrity, punk history, and full-on street smarts coursing through their veins. And if you try to pigeonhole their music using the old punk-rock rulebook, they'll strap some dynamite to your preconceived notions and kiss your butt goodbye. Simply put, Transplants don't care what you think."

About a song, I think, but it's unclear. Tim Armstrong describes their 2002 debut album by saying, "It has a summertime vibe, but he's talking about killing himself." A quote from member Rob Aston, who looks fresh-sprung from the penitentiary where he won the homey dog of the month award, recounts a recent event in Hollywood: "Me and my partner got in a fight with some fools. Cops came and all that good shit -- they're questioning motherfuckers and this and that." Tim Armstrong: "Rob is super fucking honest. He don't give a fuck about pleasing anybody." Travis Barker, Transplant and also member of the Barker family of MTV's *Meet the Barkers*, usually doesn't go out with a bodyguard, writer Michael Muller tells us. Barker says, "I think it brings more attention. I'd rather take an ass-whupping than walk around with some big fucking ogre." It is true that I finished Muller's article without awareness of what hit me. Not only that, but I've heard the Transplants, and not only was I oblivious to the nature and essence of what hit me, but for the life of me can't remember what the thing, that might have hit me, if it did, was.

Bands that have been together for at least a decade have escaped my doddering radar, bands featured in AP like Melt-Banana and Darkest Hour. Among band names, 99 percent of which slid off my scar-slick memory cells, only two adhered to a sticky and encrusted synapse in the toxic effluvia of my mind. Those were Dashboard Confessional, whom I applaud for their existential and theological pith, and Black Dahlia Murder, being a fan of that slaying. More on that combo of scamps after these words.

AP, wisely, does not narrow their demographic appeal. Here, for example, is a short piece on the band Eisely, which states: "They would actually prefer it that you call them 'wholesome.'"

"Who would take that as an insult?" asks 21-year-old singer/guitarist Sheri DuPree. "We go on tour with these bands and they party. That's what all bands do. We drink lots of coffee."

One can deduce something from the advertisers in this 192-page publication: mostly indie record companies. But also Vans, and here is a full-page *t-shirtsthatfuck.com* ad: "Offensive apparel for the whole family!" Torso-wear includes such logos as "Everytime you masturbate, God kills a kitten," "Helen, you really ought to douche," and "Ask me about my explosive diarrhea!"

"The lowest form of literature is rock journalism." -- Hunter S. Thompson. And whether or not it is the job of the rock-write community to tell you whether something is good to listen to is a question rock-write pioneer Richard Meltzer addressed repeatedly, mostly by manipulating form and content into something as irrelevant as the material at hand. An example of this was when he had his cat write an "ambient review" of a piece of "ambient music" by John Cage, which consisted of

silence. In AP's "Wiretapping" column, someone who had written a bylineless review of Black Dahlia Murder might have thought about Meltzer's approach, but didn't think it through.

"With *Miasma*, forget everything you know about the Black Dahlia Murder. The album is made up of 84 different 30-second songs, all of which are acoustic odes to singer Trevor Strnad's pet gecko, Miasma. Each track is quiet and pensive, creeping through your headphones at a snail's pace in an effort to lull you into slumber. Or we could be could be [sic] completely bullshitting you about what is surely one of the heaviest (and best) metal releases of 2005. You figure it out."

The writer (maybe editor) has the passive-aggressive killer instinct of a shy but cunning dictator. Aged rock-write advice might be to read any of Meltzer's pieces such as "A Whore Just Like The Rest," and read them to the end. I don't think you will find the word heavy or heaviest, but I can't swear to it. I can't imagine him ever typing the phrase "You figure it out."

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Best Of

***As I Lay Dying*, which prob'ly the most people read because it's the shortest**

Faulkner, okay

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Dec. 20, 1990](#)

Reading

All right, let's see if I can do this in one sitting, no leaving the typer, a thousand words on Faulkner, should be a snap.

Faulkner, wait, Hemingway. Why does (or did) anybody, even as a joke, ever consider Hemingway *the* or even a greatameritwentiethcentury (four wds. or one?) literary whatchacallit? Don't know, I'm talking vis-à-vis Faulkner, wait, what am I saying, it's easy to figure: an easy read; macho content.

Okay, well, yeah, Faulkner *is* a tough read, tougher when he wants to be than Gertrude Stein and Robbe-Grillet put together. (If he was easier to read he'd probably have gotten lynched.) But as far as macho goes, Hemingway's writing itself,

his narrative presence, y'know, language-spew, structure, general bombast ... for macho he's oftentimes a very sissyprissy guy. Never leaves a mess. Picks up after himself like a writing class teacher's pet g-g-g-goodboy. Everything in place. His slip, er, his *writerly* dirty underwear is never showing. And unless you're, I dunno, Tolstoy or Nabokov or something, that sort of writerly *anti*-oompah is a waste of life, ink, breath, sweat and fingers.

good prose is dense brush

poems

are

no more than clearings.

— " 'Prose Is Better' Says Dr. Sez,"

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William Carlos Williams

Whereas what Faulkner was about, more so than just about anybody else who ever had chops, i.e., could actually write, was writer-side mischief — if you're gonna write, why not commit some? Get away with as much as you can, do it in bulk, leaving editors (and, yes, although only secondarily, readers) gasping in your take-no-guff wake. Can you imagine, for inst, what it must've been like for some suit-tie officeprofes-sional to encounter, professionally, the manuscript for *The Sound and the Fury* in 19 — whatever it was — 28?

First hundred pages are "told," first person, by Benjy the Idiot Boy (who is also mute). Two people from his p.o.v., a he and a she, with no explanation, no *conceivable* explanation, are both called Quentin. And for every switch in type, from roman to italic and back, which occurs like every other page or so, you get a nonpredictable (and only occasionally comprehensible) shift in time frame — back?, further back?, forward?, ??? — through 30 yearsworth of forcibly ersatz idiot recall. A hundred pages of this then surprise, wow, Benjy's tale is done, relief, so you sit back and, ha, 'cause the worst is yet to come. Next hundred, told by Benjy's brother at Harvard (!), is one of the nastiest, most tortuous what-gives? obstacle runs in American so-called prose: one obnoxiously "challenging" bulk hunk of lit. With a payoff, natch, if you've got the patience and stamina to collect it, like sitting through

ten showings of *Last Year at Marienbad* before being told by an angel you'll live to 600 — but if you get up for popcorn and miss it, what the hey.... It's truly amazing, incredible, forget about even the ostensible storyline (incestIncestINCEST), that such a book saw the light of print in this here silly land in '29.

In *Light in August*, three years later, he uses these nonhyphenated composites like *stumpocked*, *boardflat*, *longdrawn* and *hookwormridden*, does it for maybe 150 pages and then no mo' — changes his mind. Changes — from then on it's hyphenates or separate words or whatever — but doesn't go back and edit everything consistent, and why should he? (Why should anyone?) Or he'll spin a narrative line, let it go as far as, y'know, to the limits of its linear narrative capacity, and then he'll respin it, totally retell it, recast it, again without seemingly altering a previous syllable, in the process doubling (in some instances tripling) his page count, ultimately presenting a record, in paper qua stone, of the Act of Writing (qua writing) in EXISTENTIAL WRITER'S TIME, i.e., not reader's time, not editor's, nor even fictive eternity's. Way to go!

Stone: granite: *Absalom, Absalom!*, written four years later, reads in many places not even as language, as linguistic record, but as geologic record, if it even is a record, or some such. You need *tools*, goddam picks and sledges to poke, peck and chip at the fucker, and even with (and even with muscle) there are no shortcuts, no options to strip-mine; and dynamite would just, well, destroy it, so read/chip slugslowly on. The story told this time (Incest vs. Miscegenation: who will win?) runs almost like a tape loop, over and over, maybe one small new piece of info every 40–50 pages... only William Burroughs has ever been more gleefully, systematically repetitive—isn't-the-word.

Speaking of which — wds. — we've got, time out, let's see, 720, 21, if you count the epigraph, 741, and including this paragraph, 763. So we ain't done yet. Of the eight, make that seven Faulkner novels I've already read, I'd have to put *Sound and the Fury* a notch ahead of *Light in August*, just a tad, really almost a tie, then a full notch down, heck, if we're gonna do this, rate them all, let's do it vertically:

1. *The Sound and the Fury*
2. *Light in August*
3. *The Wild Palms*
4. *Absalom, Absalom!*
5. *Go Down, Moses*
6. *As I Lay Dying*

7. Sanctuary

As *I Lay Dying*, which prob'ly the most people read because it's the shortest, is as low as it is because it's the shortest, and because there really isn't much payoff until maybe 40 pages from the end (the fire; comic drugstore sex scene; when pop whatsisname ends up married to a new one in the last line of the last page) — a disappointing follow-up to *The Sound and the Fury*. *Wild Palms*, on the other hand, is as high as it is because not only is it Faulkner's most romantic (per se) major work, it's also his most thematically idiosyncratic major (no incest or miscegenation) (unless my memory serves me wrong), without much doubt the great American abortion novel. *Go Down, Moses* starts more promisingly than just about any of 'em, any but *Sound and the Fury*, and in spots it's just totally overwhelming, but it's too wildly variable and ultimately, structurally, it just doesn't work — which can happen when you try to build a novel around a bunch of already existent short stories. (It's also his toughest, most annoying, to peg for auteur p.o.v.) *Sanctuary*, his longest extended act of admitted pulp, mere pulp, what today you'd call exploitation — whatsername gets raped with a corncob — ends o.k. but is otherwise barely even a major.

Best ending I've ever seen is the last paragraph, last sentence, last three-four words of Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* — you should read it — but Faulkner's certainly up there with his quota of top-tenners. Aside from *As I Lay Dying* there's the last line of *Wild Palms* (" 'Women shit!' the tall convict said") and that chapter tacked on at the end of *Light in August*, after it's all over, where the furniture guy tells his wife about these two adorable hitchhikers w/child he'd picked up en route to Tennessee. *Knight's Gambit*, a pretty good Faulkner story (110 pp.) from the late '40s, ends lousy — PEARL HARBOR plays a hand in resolving etc. — but it does have one of the great sentences, one of the truly great fragments-of-sentence in all of, well, I haven't memorized it, let me get it: "...the voice which talked constantly not because its owner loved talking but because he knew that while it was talking, nobody else could tell what he was not saying." The two greatest paragraphs in the English language, lemme get up again, are the one in *Sound and the Fury* (Modern Library College Editions, p. 219 to 222) where you find out, just before he goes out to kill himself, that Quentin Compson didn't really fuck his sister; and the one in *Wild Palms* (Vintage Books, pp. 323–24) where the lovelost abortion guy decides he *won't* kill himself (because between grief and nothing he'll take grief).

Which has gotta be at least 1000, count it, Jesus, 1300 and change; let's go for 1500:

— Not only is Faulkner's a more thoroughgoing, take-no-prisoners "stream of consciousness" than that of his immediate predecessor James Joyce, but as phenomenologist (per se) he's no slouch either, giving Husserl and *those* boys a run

for their money in isolating the meat of, and micro-honing in on, what exactly people think when they're thinking, what they experience when they experience.

— In the same sort of way that Burroughs once he gets hopping can go from the third person to the first person and back w/out missing a beat, Faulkner when he's on has a knack (and proclivity) for slipsliding into fictive outbacks where it isn't certain or even especially clear, yet it doesn't on any level matter, whether the hand as ongo-ingly dealt consists of dialogue or inner monologue or objective description or subjective description or authorial parenthetical rant, or precisely who (*if* they're speaking) are speaking, in what sequence, or even when... doesn't matter!

— Most fully defined mixed-race character (or, rather, the most interesting nongratuitous racial mix) in all of the literature is Sam Fathers in *Go Down, Moses*: half Chickasaw, three-eighths white, one-eighth black.

—Most brazen return appearance by, whoops, we're at the limit... we're outta here.

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I pause to think about how much of a staple these things have been in my life.

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[Best Of](#)

Third spud from the sun: Cameron Crowe then and now

Mr. C. Crowe was not one of rock-crit's TOP TWENTY-FIVE figures.

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Nov. 2, 2000](#)

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Michael Angarano, Patrick Fugit, and Cameron Crowe on the set of *Almost Famous*. The movie strikes me as insufferable dogmeat.

In the merry sequence of things, Cameron Crowe was the third of a conspicuous trio of teenage rock-crit wanna-bes, junior spuds from the gitgo, whose paths crossed mine in the early 1970s.

SAN DIEGO WEEKLY

Reader

Third Spud From the Sun: Cameron Crowe Then and Now

In the merry sequence of things, Cameron Crowe was the third of a conspicuous trio of teenage rock-crit wanna-bes, junior spuds from the gigs, whose paths crossed mine in the early 1970s.

The biggest cheese-puff of the bunch, if also initially the most ambitious, Jon Tiven began publishing the mimeo rag *New Haven Rock Press* during his sophomore year of high school. To look at the damn thing now, a single staple holding 20-some off-white pages together, it might be tough to figure how something so lame and ugly managed to endure the three-four years it did, but when mommy

(FROM CONTINUED ON PAGE 4B)



Top: Tiven, Crowe, and Cameron Crowe as all 30 listed members of the New Haven Rock Press. Bottom: Cameron Crowe in 1997 Academy Award Season

The biggest cheese-puff of the bunch, if also initially the most ambitious, Jon Tiven began publishing the mimeo rag *New Haven Rock Press* during his sophomore year of high school. To look at the damn thing now, a single staple holding 20-some off-

white pages together, it might be tough to figure how something so lame and ugly managed to endure the three-four years it did, but when mommy and daddy foot the bills, merit is inconsequential. Having grown up in the mansion where that spooky pic *The Other* later got shot, he made no bones about being what could be loosely termed a rich kid — *upper middle class* we today would call him — but without the “finish” his class would typically afford him: a dumb little, poor little u.m.c. dipshit, younger than his years. *Ein Kind* without much *Wunder*.



On weekends down from Connecticut, crashing sometimes at Nick Tosches' pad or mine, he brought along Tupperwares full of homecooked crap — his mother didn't trust Manhattan food. Back then, with the drinking age in New York still 18, nobody ever got asked for I.D., and Nick and I would always try to get him drunk. He'd order some wimp drink like a sloe gin fizz, and we'd tell him, "Jon, this bar has a two-drink minimum." He'd get another, and then we'd hand him some bullshit like "The custom here is to *make your own bar*" — raise a forearm to your chin and drink around it (haw!) — and like a monkey he'd go for it. (Never met another 16'er so slowww on the draw.)



When he stayed at my place, he'd have my girlfriend take him to neighborhood fop stores — "boutiques" — where he'd shop for the sorts o' things rock stars wore:

satin, velvet, "English cut." (Even girl-things with darts were okay if he could imagine Procol Harum wearing them.) He was one thudding *fool* for platform footery.

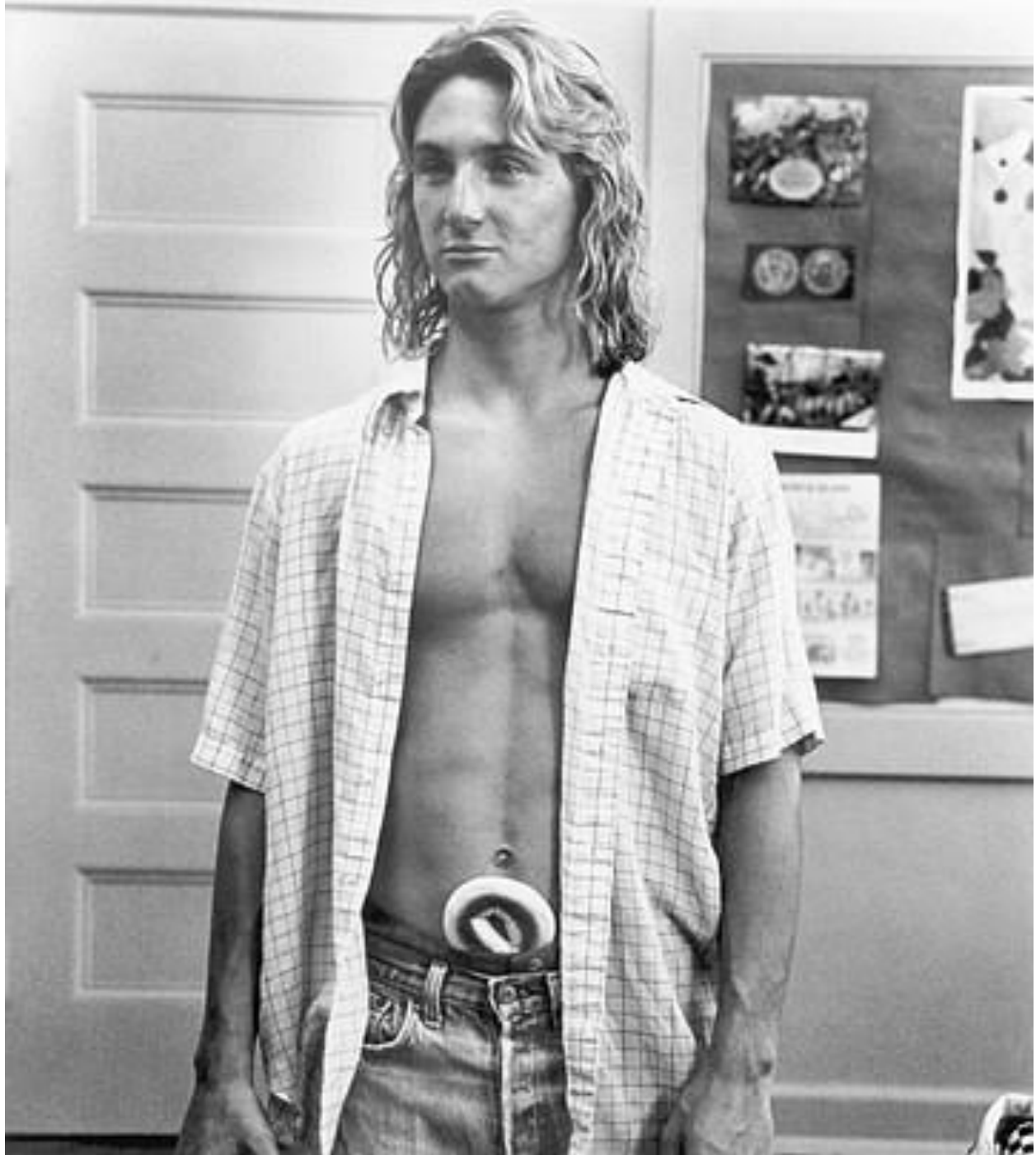


Finally, his parents sprung for a room at the New York Hilton, giving him occasion to invite this gal he met at a Nick party up for some room service *plus*, later claiming they'd whoopeed and he'd come 13 times...say what?...which led us to believe he'd never even jerked off.



If Tiven's 'zine had truly reflected his misadventures as a neophyte simp, an amateur's apprentice, that would've been one thing, but all it did was blend the

same old shit ("With this album, Elton is performing to his potential...5 stars") with a painful preadolescent cuteness ("Oatmeal Harv" was his favorite pseudonym). Issue after issue, nothing in the *New Haven Rock Press* spoke even generically of (or from) the "outrageousness of youth" — or the center of grav of its goofy enthusiasm. With an abiding Junior Achievement blandness, it sought merely to coalesce with the least anarchic, least invigorating aspects of the burgeoning rock media, to simulate "rockmag" status and in so doing score mailings of promo albs, tickets to Rod Stewart in Yonkers...oh goody.



Hey — the groovy myth of Everyperson a writer/publisher be damned: 99.9 percent of *all* 'zines — then, now, ever — are lame, tame, and insipid. As fate would have it, though, one of the great vanity rock sheets of all time was a contemporary of the *NHRP*. The progeny of a core of young hellions from the Bronx and Queens (only slightly older than Tiven himself) who would later morph into the proto-punk band

the Dictators, *Teenage Wasteland Gazette* could usually be counted on to make a fine mess. Both personally and ideologically, TWG regarded Tiven as a doofus and made him its designated enemy. "The New Haven Rock Press," wrote editor Andy Shernoff, "really sucks my noodle. If I see another fuckin review by Jon Tiven I will take action. I challenge Tiven to any form of competition he wants. I prefer 12 oz. gloves but he may want GOLF (they have a lotta country clubs in N. Haven). Eat five-iron, limey lover!" When he consequently "ducked away from confrontation" at a Blue Öyster Cult show at Gaelic Park, he was further taunted by Shernoff: "Is it true that your mother picks her nose and eats it?"

I haven't seen Jon since '76, but on evidence it would seem he made it through adolescence. Dunno 'bout the years between, but lately he's producing records by B.B. King, Wilson Pickett, and writing songs for aging blues and soul people — ain't life funny? The only thing I've heard is Buddy Guy's "Heavy Love": too heavy for a man to bear alone, he could use a little help, see? (Still makin' with the cutesy.) I leave it to soul music aficionado Kevin Kiley to fill out the picture:

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"He ruined Pickett's comeback CD with shit arrangements, REAL BAD production, GARBAGE songs written by him and his fucking wife, and bad playing in general. I hate most of today's records. Even my old favorites' new records suck, due to crummy 'modern' production techniques. I may be a dinosaur, but I know what the shit SHOULD sound like, and Tiven ain't got a fucking CLUE!

"At the Luther Ingram benefit in Memphis last year he was a self-absorbed prick, and a real asshole namedropper. He played guitar there with Mack Rice and Swamp Dogg. He brought his own guitar, one of those stupid-looking things with a whacky headstock (how do you come to MEMPHIS to play at a SOUL show without a fucking FENDER?!), he overplayed with a rock tone that had NOTHING to do with soul music, and fucked up one of Swamp's tunes, even though there were CHARTS!

"There was a birthday party for Rufus Thomas. Everyone was smiling, laughing, having a good time. Tiven had his dour, 'gotta look cool' mug on. He seemed taken aback that I didn't know his name. During our entire conversation, he rarely looked at me, but was instead surveying the happenings around the room. He had finished a CD on Sir Mack Rice, and I asked what kinda stuff was on it. 'You'll just have to wait to hear it.' It was like he was thinking, 'Leave me alone, I'm too cool, I don't want to miss anything by talking to YOU.' What a rude, condescending mother-fucker!"

For almost 30 years, the single word which might best fit the Gestalt of *NHRP's* "Los Angeles correspondent," Danny Sugerman, the face he's with extreme volition worn for the world, is SLEAZE. The night I met him, at an L.A. party in '72, the first thing he told me was "My father works for the Mafia, and I'm a heroin addict" — uttered with a great deal of teenage pride, like *Can you top either of these?* Two cool.

I've never known the veracity of boast number one, nor of number two vis-à-vis then, but in the lead story of *Methadone Today*, Volume III, Number 4 (www.tir.com/~yourtype/v3_n04.htm), Danny waxes loud and long on select details of his eighteenth detox attempt. A tour-de-force combo of personal confession (the bitter — ouch — Truth) and whole-cloth William Burroughs, of empiricism and giddy egoism (nothing in the closet 'bout me-me-ME), "Delayed Onset Withdrawal" is the first thing I've read by the guy since 1980.

Sleaze, and if there's another word, maybe Jim, y'know Morrison — he's made great hay of their ten- (or was it five?) minute relationship. Though others who were there insist that when the Doors still included Jim, before he took his death cab to Paris, young Danny's bond to the Lizard King was no more, no less, than to lurk about the band office seeking ways to be "useful," opening fan mail and perhaps going out for donuts, and while I've heard two of the three living Doors mention in passing that the grown-up Danny made their skin crawl, the dude has by sheer tenacity parlayed the lurk and its aftermath into an official calling card as "long-time Doors associate."

In 1980, he fleshed out and flavored Jerry Hopkins' stab at a Morrison bio, something variously described as a skeleton of research and a flawed ms. that had been lying around unpublishable for years. The result was *No One Here Gets Out Alive*, a ponderous and despicable piece of celebrity fluff, heavy on the "dark side" (ooh, Jim was such a bad boy) and including a cameo by a kid named "Danny." When it came out, he phoned to beckon me into the night: "Let's celebrate Jim." Uh, thanks but no-thanks...I'd rather walk my schnauzer.

In my subsequent review, I wrote: "Hey, this book stinks. I don't wanna really play its game, but one error in particular really irks my recollective whatsis. I was there at the 'infamous' Singer Bowl show of '68 and all I gotta say's Jim was wearing brown leather (not black) and if 'hundreds of teenagers were bleeding' at concert's-end (p. 195) then I guess it must've been menstrual or out in the parking lot because it certainly wasn't within proximity of the stage. Little things like that (including bogus alternate death scenarios and the scumbait sham of coddling the myth that Jim — like Paul — might still be alive) would be enough to make the cognoscenti puke if not for the trail of vom independently left in the wake of the BOOK AS IDEA." Idea? Oh,

something about the intrinsic — inseverable — connection between genius and perversion, or creativity and excess...or something.

Since then he's had his hand in another two or possibly three Doors books, plus a Guns N' Roses book...say, that's really branching out. I think the word for this is "rock-sploitation," evincing an entrepreneurial, as opposed to strictly journalistic, agenda. (When, to cover the release of Oliver Stone's *The Doors*, a European TV crew was dispatched to L.A., he wasn't deemed a relevant enough "journalist" to bother interviewing.)

For a glimpse at another of his entrepreneurial fortes — rock manager — check out *Please Kill Me*, where on p. 251 Ron Asheton tells a good'un 'bout the time Danny left his "charge," a fucked-up Iggy Pop (wearing a dress), to fend for himself when three surf louts began pounding him outside a David Bowie show, leaving him bloody and minus a couple teeth on the pavement in Hollywood.

Last I heard about Danny he was living with Fawn Hall — remember her? (What a perfectly corrupt universe.)

For whatever reason(s), Danny didn't make it to the first and only mass gathering of the U.S. rockscribble crowd, known to history, generally and simply, as "The Rockwriters Convention," Memphis '73, but Tiven was there, as was San Diego's Cameron Crowe. By sucking up to John King, marketing director for Ardent Records — a subsidiary of Stax, which underwrote the whole silly event — Tiven had a major hand in putting together the guest list, guaranteeing a sizable 'zine contingent. Since the National Rock Writers Association, as Stax had dubbed the throng, was an org of no card-carrying members, nor even of cards, to be among the chosen 140-plus signified equal parts much and nothing. Given the basic unreality of the affair, its dream-within-a-dream sound and fury, all intimations of pecking order were foolish and fruitless (the rock-crit "profession" being all of five-six years old anyway).

Still and all, a couple things about Cameron set him down a peg from even the rank and file of 'zine greenhorn dust-suckers. Unless he had an *NHRP* affiliation that no one was aware of (S.D. correspondent-*designate*?), he for all intents & purps was not even a — how you say? — *symbolically* employed writer-in-training, most likely just someone Tiven knew, or knew of, through the teen-auxiliary grapevine. While hardly the sole unaffiliated writeboy at the convention, or the only one who had yet to earn a dime from writing, he was for damnsure, in more ways than one, the

YOUNGEST such being in attendance: 16, maybe only 15, a goony-goofy gosh-oh-gee KID, blowing on a goddam kazoo. Or maybe an ocarina.

Recorder? Something. Playing Name This TV Themesong with anyone who would sit still for 30 seconds, not really that tough a score on a bus full of stationary writefolk en route to a Budweiser brew tour — playing it with, to, and at us...*Bewitched...The Flintstones...Father Knows Best...The Jetsons...*give the boy a bubble gum cigar!

Which ain't quite the same as leading with your own chin, or wearing a lampshade on your head, or actually demanding, *Pay attention, dammit* — hey, he wasn't that assertive — but the Cameron I met on the bus was certainly more forward — sassy — cheeky — than "William Miller," the sullen little cocksucker standing in for him in this flick he's got out now, *Almost Famous*. More cheerful and outgoing, he wurn't no self-conscious smallfry (taller than me, and I was 28). Why he would go and turn himself into a solemn sawed-off goody-goody geek — someone less bearable than he was at that age — is a mystery. 'Cause in '73 he was, well, bearable. (More, at any rate, than either Tiven or Sugerman.)

In the months following the convention, he wrote for the *San Diego Door* and *Creem* (at the time edited by former San Diegan Lester Bangs, who'd also been on the Bud bus), before eventually landing in *Rolling Stone*. When people I meet these days find out I once myself wrote for the fugging *Stone*, they ooh and ahh, then I tell 'em, "Sure, but fortunately I've had the good sense to never stick my nose in a garbage disposal." It's debatable whether the *Stone* had ever been a class venue for the *writing* of rockwriters — appearing in its pages was basically always about visibility and money. Well before there was anything like a rockwrite style sheet — a by-the-numbers for dealing with this thing-called-rock, a throbbing whatsem that for a while remained relatively nascent-and-nasty — in the rock/underground/counterculture press at large, *Rolling Stone* had one in spades. Heavy-handed editors — the meanest in the biz — would routinely (as a matter of policy) alter your text without consulting you; delete entire paragraphs if they contained the itsiest allusion to people or things the "fact checker" of the day was having trouble finding backup on; try to coerce you out of positions you'd taken on favored musical celebs. By the time Cameron showed up, the paper was little more than a highwater marker for self-effacing, slave-drudge careerism: the most conspicuous place, nationally, to have your copy butchered, your ideas reshaped to fit the moment's market-driven party line.

Salon.com has called *Almost Famous* "a sweet-natured paeon to the '70s, a time when...editors at magazines like *Rolling Stone* told their staff to write the truth and damn the consequences" — what a hoot! First of all, there were no other mags "like"

the *Stone*, but the only “truth” it sought was a sprinkling of sensationalism (“Dead Busted in N.O. — Set-Up Suspected”). Another review claims that the *Stone* in those days ran “more exposés than puff pieces.” Gimme a break: the *Stone* INVENTED the rock ‘n’ roll puff piece.

Rolling Stone in the ‘70s was, as it remains today, a TRADE PAPER, a record industry HYPE SHEET, a promulgator of mass compliance in the Consumer Sector, a principal factor in the dumbing, maiming, and calming down of the public’s taste for a rock-roll beast that had once indeed been not only wild & crazy but GENUINELY ANARCHIC. (Radical! — with or without the superadding of topical content.) The very idea, as nearly every review has put it, of the film’s “poking fun” at *Rolling Stone*...whew. Would you have “poked fun” at Nixon for killing two million Southeast Asians? Hey, folks: *Rolling Stone* is not some venerable institution in need, from time to time, of a good-natured lampoon or two. Like mtv to follow, it has for a longgggg time been one of the big things GRAVELY WRONG WITH THE WORLD.

Jimmy Olsen incarnate, the youthsome Mr. Crowe accepted the *R.S.* style sheet implicitly, in all likelihood worked very hard, but essentially got and kept the gig when it was discovered that rock stars, such a sensitive lot, were less intimidated by him than by actual functional grownups, who had the disconcerting habit of asking grownup questions. He would never, for inst, have thought to ask Jimmy Page, as interviewers already had, whether the guitarist, pre-Led Zeppelin, had in fact “done” a certain Linda E., famous for later marrying Someone Big — done her (he’d privately boasted) with a PICKLE. Cameron’s writeup of Led Zep demonstrated his ability to fill pages as glibly as the next bozo, and a tad more affably to boot. Y’know: cheerfully. But it offered scarcely a hint of the service-with-a-smile he would provide the Singer-Songwriter gang in the years ahead — as its advocate, mouthpiece, interlocutor, shill...its virtual publicist and “man inside” the *Stone*.

Ah, the gang: I knew it well. I’d had an encounter with one of its thugs, see, and in the process got tossed by said mag for telling what was it?, oh yes, the truth. This was ‘72. After several false starts, Jackson Browne finally had an album out, which seemed a good occasion to bring to light some interesting hokum from his past — I’d known the mutha since ‘67. So I did the first feature on him for *Rolling Stone* or anywhere else — a rave, for crying out loud, and he freaking hated it, thought it made him look “too punk.” And what might be so wrong with that? Before twelve people knew who the fuck he was, he was like some weird-isn’t-the-word cross between the Young Marble Giants, say — or from a later universe: Cat Power — and Byron or Shelley. On his first visit to New York, he backed up (and horizontal-danced with) the fabulous NICO, had a connection to Lou Reed and the Warhol crowd, blah blah blooey. So I talked all this stuff up — what the hey — it was what I thought would

make him MOST APPEALING. And he's so upset he gets Asylum Records prez David Geffen to call the *Stone* and have me booted, good riddance, don't come back.

Four years later, I was eating at South Town Soul Food in L.A. when Jackson walked in with gang-sister number one Linda Ronstadt. Not wanting her exposed to my cooties, he motions for her to stay put, struts over, sits down, and in less than a minute explains to me *how it is*. "We singer-songwriters" — he always relished being part of something (but imagine *calling* yourself such hogwipe) — "feel we get a *better shake* from this Cameron kid...he never *challenges us*...accepts our side of the story...we don't have to worry what he'll say...no offense, but..." I.e., writers exist to write-about-musicians, bub...so go wash dishes or something.

To some extent, Lester Bangs was prob'ly cheated by posterity when he got pigeon-holed in *Stone* as a punk-rock scribbler, more or less, but at least there's some oompah to that. Just dig it if your rockwrite credential consisted to an inordinate degree of your coverage of Jackson, Linda, and related twaddle — a subset of the rock mainstream which by the mid-'70s was almost Exhibit A of how far rock had sunk, how far it had gone in the direction of ceasing-to-be. Not to mention the decidedly SOFT edge (and LIGHT weight) implicit in such a number: being *that* kind of rockwriter...yow. (Where's the existential reverb in that one?)

Anyway, after a tour of *Stone* duty had given him enough chops to deal with non-rock matters, Cameron wrote *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, a youth-demographic pile of pulp which few people in L.A. ever seriously considered — re his contention (and his publisher's marketing premise) — a work of non-fiction. Like had Cameron, by now in his twenties, actually gone back to school, where he impersonated (and passed for) a student? Not v. many thought so. Which is fine, who cares, but anyhow I haven't read it, nor did I see the '82 film of the same name (for which he got both script and "novel" credit), nor have I seen any of the later cinematic thingies he's written, directed, or produced, except for the current monstrosity.

I'm probably not the person to judge his oeuvre, but *Almost Famous*, which he wrote, directed, and produced, and which purportedly draws its content from the dawn's early light of his own rockwrite apprenticeship, strikes me as insufferable dogmeat, coming from the same neverneverland (w/ the *briefest* shot of nipples thrown in) as a bad week's episode of *Happy Days*. A first-string ditz based on the auteur's MOTHER provides plot annoyance throughout (hey, she's a *player*). Has there been such parental non-exclusion in an alleged rock film since *Bye Bye Birdie*? All-age sentimental slop: the sort of film that if it wasn't *nominally* a rock film you'd bring in violins to ensure, and intensify, audience submission at every emotional checkpoint. The scene towards the end where the William kid wags a

finger at the guitarist (whose music he so-o-o respects) for mistreating the groupie (who respects *and* loves the bloke), thus triggering plot resolutions that culminate in fame and fortune for both (and vicarious gratification for the groupie), is something Ron Fucking Howard wouldn't put in one of *his* dogmeat films. And the actual "rock" soundtrack? Well, the FIRST TWO TUNES are the Chipmunks' Xmas single and Simon & Garfunkel's "America" — ye gods. (Don't wanna turn off the grandmas.)

Aside from all the references to *Creem* and *Rolling Stone*, and the recurrent presence of Lester Bangs as dramatis persona, *Almost Famous* is clearly a fiction film. It would be kind of absurd to try and extract from it anything *specifically* autobiographical re its director's own historical past, and/or his present retrospect on such biz, but shoot — long as we're here — let's go for it. To wit: Does Cameron Crowe, former rockwriter, have the self-awareness to grasp the true basis of his early career? (Do the Jimmy Olsens — cub reporters for Dotted-Line Central — even in retirement realize they were once dupes and decoys of the first water?) Possibly not, but by recasting the setup from the p.o.v. of an utter bumpkin/child/innocent, by using the b/c/i as a model of generic reporterly integrity, by going SO wide of the personal-historical mark — assuming, of course, the guy remembers anything pre-*Ridgemont High* — the frigging movie registers on my shit detector (don't know 'bout yours) as a willful act of evasion. A gross cultural-personal "lie."

All this poppycock with little William as "the enemy" — someone bands have reason to fear! — feels suspiciously like what in football parlance you'd call the ol' misdirection play. Sure, you bet — the mid-'70s Cameron, like most of his colleagues, did at times have to wear down or slip under bands' defenses in pursuit of et cetera, yet even after repeated encounters manymost of his targets welcomed his amiable crit-cum-hype. Compared to the rest of the write pack, even after he'd grown a bit, he remained inherently harmless. The millennium Cameron, meanwhile, would like us to view li'l Will as anything but harmless: a tough little bulldog dead-set on "getting the story" (when, in any case, "story" and "truth" are separate domains of the journaloid firmament).

But like so what. A shitty movie suggested by an unaffecting (if "successful") life. They make 'em all the time.

What's troublesome is the movie's use of Lester. I won't even complain about Philip Seymour Hoffman, who after makeup and coaching isn't totally unlike Lester — he's just not especially like him. Did they get the mustache right? Well, he only had one about a tenth of the time ('70-'83) that I knew him. Cigarettes? If in his lifetime he sometimes smoked, he was hardly a smoker (drank far more bottles of Romilar — full

bottles — than he smoked individual cigs). (If you want an actor's version of somebody quitelike Lester, personally like him in significant mammal ways, rent Gus Van Sant's first feature, *Mala Noche*. Tim Streeter is Lester to a T. And not too far afield — don't laugh — is Smiley Burnette, the comic sidekick in old Gene Autry films.)

And why *not* use Lester? A dab of Lester will add a touch of class — certainly of interest — to virtually any proceeding. (A little 'll go a long way.) But for Cameron to have him bouncing around as the movie's roving "disclaimer" — a guy who'd rather listen to the Stooges than the Eagles; who knows the difference between commodity and culture — is BAD FAITH, pure and simple. At least that's what Sartre would call it.

What's laughable — and downright insidious — is Cameron actually believes Lester "influenced" him. He's said so in a score of interviews. Lots of folks are claiming he influenced them, like this third-rate gossip at the *L.A. Times*, Patrick Goldstein. When he wrote full-tilt, Lester was a STAND-UP IDEOLOGUE, a man on a total-assault LIFE MISSION — not some careerist cluck lockstepping to the illusions of payday and acclaim. Conviction and contention oozed out of him like they did from any front-line '50s Beat poet. He influenced the likes of Cameron and Patrick about as much as he influenced Clinton and Reagan.

The dictionary def.: "(1) To affect or alter by intangible means; sway (2) To have an effect on the condition or development of; modify" — 's a matter of cause/effect. To have caused (if he did) budding young Cameron to perform acts *not* in kind: is that influence? As far as rockwriters go, the whole last 30 years of 'em, with the exception of Metal Mike Saunders (from Arkansas — you prob'ly never heard of him), Lester influenced NO ONE. He was the end of a line — believe it! — not the beginning of one. Even "inspired" would be too strong a word, too active. At best, Cameron and his ilk *received* inspiration, or let's put it this way: *perceived* what they received to be inspiration. From bad faith to blind faith...

Fuggit.

In all probability (and with all due respect), on the *hottest* writing day of the rock phase of his professional life, Mr. C. Crowe was not one of rock-crit's TOP TWENTY-FIVE figures (list available upon request). He was simply one of the era's more readable hacks — a cheerful, good-natured hack, but still a hack — one about whom the best and worst that can be said is he was benign. As in: he didn't cause cancer, nerve damage, birth defects, or ingrown toenails. But in the merry scheme of things,

considering the range of hands, dealt and undealt, some if not all of us have lived, embraced, fought, raved, and died for, what the bloody, bleeping hell is BENIGN?

If you go and see his stupid flick, please keep that question in mind.

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It sounds like Meltzer was envious of Crowe's success. What a sour grapes rant by someone whose prose is barely readable. I liked "Almost Famous" a lot as a Hollywoodized glimpse of the '70s; I didn't expect a Bob Dylan documentary like "Don't Look Back" from D.A. Pennebaker.

May 15, 2015

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Best Of

***Crawdaddy* gets Richard Meltzer to write about television**

The tubes of my life

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Sept. 2, 1982](#)

Feature Stories



How to get my sis and me to agree on a show (like wouldn't it be great?). She, relative baby that she is, can still stand Howdy Doody, which by now makes my skin crawl.

It is 1967 (fall), New York. I have been writing for *Crawdaddy!* — *The Magazine of Rock* for the past 10–11 months. Although I've had several landmark pieces published by 'em, contributing greatly to what will soon be known far and wide as "rock criticism," I have not been paid a cent — this despite the fact that the *Times* has labeled *Crawdaddy* the "fastest-growing publication in America." While this may be a slight exaggeration and anyway growth from nothing to something *always* involves suspiciously hokey rates of blah blah blah — editor/publisher Paul Williams is not exactly hurting for what might currently pass for material comfort. Living in a cute little apt. in the same building on Jane Street where Alexander Hamilton died after being plugged by Aaron Burr, he's been jetting regularly between N. Y. and new-age culture center San Francisco for the last half-year — which has gotta mean the mag's already netted him a cool four figures and that's four more than it's netted me.

It's the fall of '67 and I'm beginning to complain. To placate me, newly hired asst, editor Candy or Mary or Shelly or something (who will later break William's heart by marrying art director David Flooke) tells me I can probably make a few bucks writing for her old pal Ralph Ginzburg's latest scam, *Fact*. She talks it over with Ralph and they come up with why don't I write about TV. Sounds good to me — I'm sick of writing about music anyway — so I get to work. I smoke a lot of dope and decide the shift from rock-roll to TV has gotta be, y'know, monumental; 's gotta be as all-

or-nothing as my still-not-published bore-'em-to-death structuralist manifesto *The Aesthetics of Rock*.

I smoke more dope and watch a 3 a.m. Jungle Jim movie, focusing mainly on its cheesy disjointed space-time, for some reason (prob'ly dope) thinking small-screen makes a major diff, adding (or subtracting) a perceptual dimension that a big-screen encounter with same would somehow lack (or not lack). The mind's customary circuitry for spatio-temporal proceedings, I decide, is rechanneled or unchanneled or who knows what by the smaller-than-life frame so that you're forced to judge for yourself, microsecond to microsecond, whether the standard-issue sensory world does (or does not) have any play. In a play of my own on Kant's synthetic a priori I come up with the *synoptic* a priori, something to do with vision (in the "big" sense) as *given*. I scribble out a page or two (this is before the discovery of the typewriter) and give up; this is by far the stupidest stuff I've ever writ.

It is 1949, Rockaway Beach, N. Y. One day after kindergarten a new appliance (my mother loves 'em) arrives, a Capehard 10-incher in a box. First image that appears on the "television set" is that of a cowboy hitting another cowboy with a chair; I promptly burst into tears and run to my room. As if the brutality of the image is not heinous enough, it is also in black and white, a chromatic format that in the daily comic section I cannot stand or even compute (I wait till Sunday for *color*). I have not yet seen a movie, a cartoon, anything, in a theater (and the only clock in my household is, yes, digital — ain't life funny!).

1968 (summer). Under the influence of wonder-drug LSD (25) I watch *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* at the temporary communal digs of the Soft White Underbelly, earliest incarnation of the Blue Oyster Cult. It's Huntington (L.I.) or somewhere. Though the set is B&W, I see everything in glowing color, and it's hard to tell the characters apart 'cause they all have pointy ears. Elements of plot keep repeating themselves in so heavy-handed a manner, so *exactly the same* every time, that at one point I'm actually convinced an entire week has gone by and it's a whole new episode I'm watching — they couldn't possibly be using the same riff *that* many times in a single show, could they??? *Ed Sullivan* follows, it's his 20th anniversary and the best he can come up with is Lana Cantrell (singing the answer version of "Honey," y'know Honey herself singing from *heaven*), Jerry Vale with gray streaks in his hair (doing Dusty Springfield's "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me"), and Alan King; it is so bottomlessly pathetic all I can do is laugh or cry (hint: I do not cry). Next comes *The Smothers Bros.* with tit jokes so nonironically nonfunny (or maybe merely ironically nonfunny) that I throw my T-shirt at the screen, thinking they

oughta make screens stronger for times like this, so you could even throw a shoe and get away with it.

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1968 (fall). Rockaway again. With an ounce of second-rate weed that is my “interest” on a hundred-dollar investment in my friend Howie’s burgeoning dope-deal career, I sit and watch *whatever’s on*. Which this one night turns out to be some Jimmy Stewart abomination about oil drillers off the Louisiana shore, their lives and loves and the shrimp fishermen who hate their guts. I get so “involved” in the unfolding story there is no way I can drag myself away, if I tune out unresolved tangles of plot will cause me to die (or at least suffer for the remainder of my days), it’s 4 a.m. and I’m dog-tired but that’s the breaks. Finally, when Dan Duryea marries a townie and Jimmy shows Gilbert Roland where the Big Shrimp are, the tension leaves my soul and I sleep like a fish.

1966, home from college. Nothing better to do than sit around with mom and dad and watch some wretched WW2 thingie with Jack Warden held captive in the South Pacific. Could very well have been some top-rated series ‘cause that’s all they watched. In four years of higher ed I haven’t watched a heck of a lot besides the occasional sporting event, I’ve easily overcome any addiction I might’ve had, and this one’s so lame I’m ready for bear, laughing at all the wrong parts — i.e., all the *parts* (I’ve studied Dada so I know the triggers) — and pissing off the old lady without letup. With a good ten minutes to go I can smell a captor-is-Korean-so-American-prisoner-will-appeal-to-his-incipient-anti-Japanese-tendencies ending, I broadcast it without hesitation and sure enough I’m right. Says mom when it’s over: “I hope you realize you *ruined* the show for me.”

1. I’ve gotten used to cowboys and chairs and followed their exploits as far as both of ‘em can take me. A Hopalong Cassidy gun & holster were my gift for getting my tonsils out but it’s over a year since I’ve worn ‘em. In my young culinary mind, Gene Autry is salmon to Roy Rogers’s tuna but all I’m eating lately is potato sticks. In need of new excitement, I go whole hog for outer space and learn everything I will ever need to know about space & time. From Captain Video I pick up the concept “infinity.” From Tom Corbett, Space Cadet, I learn “dimension.” From the Flash Gordon serials, which I see so many times I eventually get to *memorize* them, I learn, well, everything: the myth of eternal return, the absurdity of this place rather than that, the laws of physics as mere adjuncts to the imagination, horror of vacuum, the reversibility of sequence, the temporality of drama, etc., etc., etc. The greatest scene I will ever see (cinematic, theatrical, televisionoid, real-life, etc.) is the one in the first Flash serial where he’s got this shovel chained to his arm and he’s got to keep shoveling coal to keep the flying castle inhabited by Voltan and his Birdmen afloat; if he takes it off he dies but somehow Zarkov gets it off for him and

he heaves it into the furnace and jumps behind this incredibly archetypal *wall* (end of chapter).

2. TV is such a big deal by now some kid in my class offers me four Scoop cards for the one I got announcing the news item "Joan of Arc Burned" (as it originally appeared in the *International Times*, 1431) simply because he thinks it's "Joan of RCA." I'm a better reader than him but I keep my mouth shut.

1956 (September). A pitifully lame (even you would agree) 4'7", eleven-year-old four-eyes with nowhere to go but continued scholarship, stamp collecting, and the sewer, I finally get to stay up "late," meaning beyond 8 p.m. for a change (my folks are real cards), and catch *Ed Sullivan* for the very first time. Whuddaya know if his guest is none other than Elvis "The Pelvis" Presley, whose manic eyes and twitching remind me instantly of Kevin McCarthy in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, my favorite picture to date. Sucked in by that alone (as far as I'm capable of knowing at the time — I haven't even seen a dirty magazine, let alone beat off), I take maybe a second or two to get caught up in the hoodoo joy & anarchy of the event and know (in whatever bones are mine) that I have never seen anything quite like this before, that because of it I will never be quite the same again. And I'm not — from that moment on I refuse to go to bed before 10. I select my own clothes, comb my "regular" with vaseline, and affect a walk that prompts my father to tell me, "Stop that! — you look like a Negro." To catch more of at least the sonic side of Elvis and his ilk, I take over the family radio and 78 machine (no more Burl Ives! no more Bing!), thus discovering the usefulness of two modern-age appliances I couldn't have given two shits about before.

1956 (November or so: a reverie). *\$64,000 Question* is not just a swell route to instant riches, it's a real muscle of a show. No reason I couldn't be on it. I can grow sideburns, change my name to Elvis Meltzer, wear a leather jacket and pointy-toed shoes, and my category ought to be dirty, rotten filth & sex (I have by now heard some "hooer" jokes and seen Jayne Mansfield in a mag). On my first appearance I will be cool as all get-out; the seventh-grade girls will see me and next school day they'll all let me "feel them up." Second appearance Hal March will already know just how cool I am, he'll say, "*Mister Meltzer*, why don't you show us your scumbag?" at which point I whip out my ' 'bag,' ' just loaded with scum, and toss it into the audience where some well-stacked cutiey lifts her skirt (no panties 'cause she's been expecting this), it lands right in her "pussy," she gets pregnant and Jesus she *loves it*. (By show's end I am the biggest thing in America, and \$16,000 richer to boot.)

July '57 (it is). Aside from still being a 4-foot-7 four-eyes, with twelve birthdays now by the wayside, there is really no reason I shouldn't be enjoying my first summer away from the "folks." But at Camp Kahagon, out in the wilds of Bucks County (Pa.),

I'm not thinking softball, I'm not thinking archery, all I'm thinking (two seconds out of three) is I'm more 'n likely to fry in hell. Yes, for the mortal sins of *bearing false witness* (I have lied on at least three occasions) and failing to *honor my father and mother* (I've "talked back" to the creeps more times than that) — as well as for several possible others I'm not yet familiar with as violations of the Law of God — I am all but certain to fry for eternal 4-ever.

What has brought on this latest outbreak of damnation heebie-jeebies (more common around my house than the goddam cold) is the fact that last and final night before camp Billy Graham was on. When it comes to scaring the living piss out of you're your eternal place of rest, Billy can be pretty gruesomely persuasive, but he ain't nothing compared to Daddy Meltz using same to exact his toll of parental flesh. D.M., a "student of comparative religion" who has so far been *extremely* effective with the household program of no pleasure in this here life, this time used Billy so keenly, so willfully, so this-and-not-that-fully that my beloved sister Nancy, only nine years alive herself, composed a highly sincere postcard to Billy, the reverse reading, "I hereby give my soul to Jesus Christ our Lord." The morning of our departure to wonderful Kahagon, the old man grabbed said card from the family mailhole, telling Nancy, "I'll hold this for you. Some day you'll laugh about it."

In the wilds of Pennsylvania, both of us realize — in no uncertain terms — that our male parent is full of shit. What my sister does with this realization I do not know. What I do (with it) is maybe 2.3 percent of my heebie-jeebs're canceled out, leaving a mere 97.7 to spin on the spit for July and August, hoping against hope that Billy will not return come fall (so that the motherfucking bastard will not have a TV star to use against us come, ugh, schooltime). Meantime I am feeling flames up my thigh every time I spot a frog, every time I look under a rotten log for salamanders or — dare I say it — snakes.

1960 (November). The creeps have already gone to sleep. I *believe* they've both voted Kennedy (although with the old man you never can be sure). It's 5-6 a.m. and Chet Huntley, David Brinkley look *awfully* disappointed as they finally project, with the aid of computer science, John F. as the winner over Nixon. I then call it a day myself — perchance to not be dead on my feet come high school tomorrow — sure for the first time in my life that I know what "biased news" is all about.

June of '69. Bobby Abrams, editor of a new music sheet called *Fusion*, stops over at the Soft White Underbelly house, this time in Great Neck, for a rendezvous with band manager Sandy Pearlman, whom he seeks as a writer for his mag and who, as is usually the case, is not around. He remembers my name from ' 'What a Goddam

Great Second Cream Album" piece for *Crawdaddy* and, overstuffed with music writers per se, asks if I'd mind writing about TV, which sounds just jake to me. As my final break from *Crawdaddy* has been traumatic and I haven't really appeared in too many elsewheres since, I decide to adopt a real neat pseudonym, Borneo Jimmy, and that night park myself in front of the color rental set with my typewriter, pecking out joyous nonsense as the swill runs by. My latest attachment to the medium thereby clinched, I spend the better part of the summer watching the Mets, at first just to catch two-plus hours of green, later to ride the diamond-thrills bandwagon as they go on to win it all. In the process I learn the joys of beering while watching, and for election night '69 I move up to tequila.

1971 (whole damn year, Manhattan). I watch; I write; I am. Entrenched before my black-and-white all the livelong day, I watch everything but soap operas as my typing hands dissect the universe bit by bit. Never have I known such a trigger to the writerly unconscious; never have I cared less what is on.

1972 (spring). In town on a rock-roll freebie to interview the up-and-coming Jackson Browne, I sleep over at Liza Williams's pleasure dome in semihilly L. A. and have the good fortune to attend her then-beau Charles Bukowski's first "intentional" encounter with the cathode monster (color). During *Cannon* he yells, "What a man!" every time Wm. Conrad manages to do something right. At a crucial moment of some poignant love pic he tells the protagonist, who has just lost his gal, "You're better off without her." (He reminds me of my Russian immigrant grandmother, to whom even radio was quite a jolt, talking to the screen during a segment of *People Are Funny* where a bachelor had to answer questions from the studio audience about cooking; she got zero right to the bachelor's one.) Later, when the projectionist falls asleep during *I Shot Jesse James* starring John Ireland, he glares at the bouncing image and propounds: "See — they haven't got the technology down yet!"

1. I wage a bitter struggle with my progenitors for control of the Thursday-night tube. Wrestling versus *Playhouse 90*, who will win??? Finally a deal is struck: alternate weeks. In the first two weeks of the deal they miss part one of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and (following Thursday) I miss Mark Lewin and Don Curtis losing the U.S. tagteam championship to Dr. Jerry Graham and his brother Eddie.

1954 (continued). The problem as defined by mom and dad: How to get my sis and me to agree on a show (like wouldn't it be great?). She, relative baby that she is, can still stand *Howdy Doody*, which by now makes my skin crawl. Not long ago we both dug a local game show called *Sense and Nonsense*, which palled for contestants to identify sensory objects by each of their major five while all (or most) of the remaining four were kept in darkness, but this year it is no longer on. The parents, no

better at TV projection than they are at parenting, herald the arrival of *Lassie* as a sibling-compromise godsend. They are wrong, they are *very* wrong (I will not even accept a collie as a dog, I would just as soon accept Elsie the Cow as the star of a show).

1975 (late). Now living in L.A. and wondering why (I haven't "had sex" in a month so what's all this Babylon crap *about?*), I manage to leave a music-biz press party with a bouncy babe who claims to have taught Squeaky Fromme how to handle a handgun. We roll around carnally for what seems like several hours, during which I don't look up once to check the TV until, with my dango in her oral craw, I somehow notice that *Larceny, Inc.* is on. Even in boring black and white (my current set is a Sony Trinitron that I went halvesies on with my New York sweetie just in time to catch the '74 Super Bowl; in parting for sunny So-Cal I insisted on taking the set, leaving her with the stereo), *Larceny, Inc.* still stars Jack Carson, Edw. G. Robinson, Broderick Crawford as a comic thug, Anthony Quinn, Jackie Gleason, and Edward Brophy. Although the sensations on my unit are not-half-bad, I take leave of the suction to turn up the sound, as I have seen the fantastic pitcher only twice to date.

1977 (December). I am very much in love. Every night with my newly unearthed eternal mate is one long blissful stretch of bliss-till-dawn. Sleep is out of the question, as it would separate our waking souls for too long to even compute. The machine is always on, and we catch nightly doses of Hugo Haas, *I, the Jury* starring Biff Elliot, *Cover Girl* (not the title but it's close) with Shelley Winters, and something with Howard Duff as the news photog who stages crimes in order to snap 'em. Abuzz with love-of-life, I register extreme displeasure at (between the flicks) Ben Hunter or maybe the other Hunter trying to peddle orphans to viewers, prodding them into revealing their hobbies and/or knowledge of a foreign language. (Pretzels and ginger ale are beside the bed.)

1978 (Sept.). With songwriter royalties from the Blue Oyster Cult's *Spectres* LP, for which I contributed the lyric to something called "Death Valley Nights," I make the most outlandish consumer acquisition of my life (other than automotive), shelling out \$900 (plus tax) for a Sony Betamax. What makes the purchase particularly silly is the fact that aside from late movies, which are rarely on more than one at a time anymore, and which I will be watching firsthand anyway, there is nothing on TV that a month in Saskatoon would force me to worry about "missing." Oh well, I can always start a boxing "library" (my first taping of any sort the second Ali-Spinks fight) and, until the royalties run out, a stack of monster cassettes as well (for starters: *The Slime People*, B&W, 1962).

1981 (July, November). Two burglaries (my place), two TVs gone in a flash, a nifty irony considering the fact that my primary source of local income is (for the first time in ten years) a column covering the TV beat. First time around (in the midnight hour) thief or thieves (as the case may be) also take the Betamax, which I haven't used in over a year, an Atari video-game thing (with Space Invaders cartridge) that my sister gave me for Xmas, the instruction manuals to both, the warranty to the latter, and the current *TV Guide*. I am miraculously left with 40–50 Beta cassettes, which I can't subsequently unload at any price, as in the interim the world has pretty thoroughly converted to VHS — which I would probably convert to myself (given another royalty wad to again spend like a dumb fucking asshole).

Borrowing only a relatively smallish wad, however, I foolishly invest in a new (but considerably smaller) Trinitron, like a dodo bringing it home to the same first-floor alley apartment that has already revealed its vulnerability to illicit entry. This time they score it in broad daylight and are about to remove the stereo as well, dropping it with a thud and leaping out the window as I return from cashing my latest TV column check. Evidently, the world wants TVs. As far as I am concerned, the world can have 'em. (I will not buy another, I promise myself, not as long as there is air in these lungs—cough, cough, *cough*. Gifts, well that's a different story; loaner sets — hey! — they're OK too. As to possible effects of being setless, y'know on my column itself, I cannot think of *one*.)

Meantime I am so unnerved by the callousness of the LAPD to my plight that after twice of it I swear (on a stack) I will never call these swinefucks again—not if Hitler shoots my puppy. On each occasion they refuse to take fingerprints or look for clues, not even fake ones just to humor me (I'm not rich enough to merit such, uh, preferential treatment; my loss as a mere crime stat will help their salary demands and that's the only reason they've made the trip). They talk *Adam 12* gobbledygook like they were born to the genre, giving up only upon realizing that (even if I *did* once have a set) I am one of those sickos whose minds have not been teeveed to blithering submission; sensing I cannot be conned, they abandon their Milner/McCord deadpans and eyeball heavy loads of real genuine *hate* my way. I curse the lying, piss-sucking servants of the ruling class till they're out on the street, swearing (on the very same stack) I will never again watch that most insidious of pro-palace-guard propaganda vehicles, *Hill Street Blues*—when or if, that is, I get to borrow another electronic marvel from someone smart enough to no longer want his or her own anymore.

1970 (Shirley, N.Y.). While wintering it at my parents' summer retreat (I am trying my damdest to "hide"), I have grown quite attached to a neighborhood cat named Spooky, whom the wonderful residents of Baybright Drive have chosen not to feed,

forcing him (they hope) to live off the moles of the land (through two feet of snow, yet). Since I provide him with goodies well beyond the normal range of catfood mush (canned hams and corned beefs, for inst, from the parents' storm-cellar stash), he generally visits my doorway, perchance to feast and warmly slumber, nightly at around 10.

After making it a regular routine for about a month, Spooky all of a sudden does not show up for four entire days; I leave a food tray outside, but there is no sign he has eaten from it. I am frankly worried he's been splattered by a snowplow and have all but given up any hope of ever seeing him again when on the fifth night I turn on the original *Thief of Bagdad*, which as a kid I must've seen 10-15 times (TV was once good for something). While I'm watching I keep an ear peeled for cat sounds, once in a while even sticking my nose into the freezing goddam night.

Finally it gets to the part where Sabu's stuck on some faraway island and it's not looking too good for him to ever get back and save his master from being stuck in the body of a dog; he's run through his three wishes and the genie is no help. Some good spirit or something then shows up from out of the blue or maybe it's just a voice, anyway he gets told to never give up believing—for believing beyond all hope he will be rewarded by the good fairy of all good believers (or some such hokum). At that very moment — voila! — Spooky appears at the door, very cold, very hungry ... a TV/realworld simultaneity (call it TV magic, I won't mind) that will certainly *do*.

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Best Of

O.J. trial makes me want to leave L.A.

Does nothing EXIST anymore that isn't TV?

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

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Feature Stories



The morning after: Nicole Brown and Ronald Goldman murder scene

Arthur Honegger, *Rugby*, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Charles Dutoit, Erato 2292-4542-2

Rice University Marching Owl Band, "Louie, Louie," on *The Best of Louie, Louie*, Rhino R2 70605

Charles Mingus, *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, Atlantic 8809-2

Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*, with Placido Domingo, Renata Scotto, Sherrill Milnes, National Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by James Levine, RCA RCD2-2951

Neil Young, "Down by the River," on *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, Reprise 2282-2

Ruggiero Leoncavallo, *Pagliacci*, with Carlo Bergonzo, Joan Carlyle, Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, Deutsche Grammophon 419 257-2

Joe Turner, "Cherry Red," on *The Boss of the Blues*, Atlantic 8812-2

Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, Boston Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Georges Pretre, RCA 60478-2-RV

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Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 5*, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Georg Solti, London 430 443-2

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The Velvet Underground, "I'm Set Free," on *The Velvet Underground*, Verve 815 454-2

Sonny Rollins, "There's No Business Like Show Business," on *Worktime*, Prestige OJCCD-007-2

I don't know ANYTHING about the O.J. trial, I don't CARE about the O.J. trial, I'm not gonna WATCH the O.J. trial, I'm not even CONCERNED that the trial be fair ('cause how could it be?), and the only thing all this O.J. biz has done for MY homelife is to strengthen my desire, fortify my resolve to get the fuck out of L. A. — after years of earthquakes and bullshit and just complaining. I saw ten seconds — no more — of the Car Chase (O.J./Day One, or was it already Day Three?) on somebody's TV and promptly left the room. I don't watch enough on my own — only *Sumo Digest*, every two months on UHF — to even bump into this shit. The minimum amount you can't avoid, you can't avoid. I'll see a photo on *People Mag* or the *Enquirer* at a checkout but rarely even read the cover text. Do I know the name of the wife he's alleged to've killed? Michelle, I think; I'm not sure. (A blonde, right?) The other guy, him I don't know by name or face. Stabbing? Strangling? Stabbing, I think. Something also about gloves. And blood. DNA? That's all I know. All I wanna know.

Does nothing EXIST anymore that isn't TV? Does "existential" now mean "as received from hands dealt by FCC-licensed broadcast entities"? Is nothing perceivable (I'm talking even biologically) in terms other than those so dealt?

Deathstyles of the Rich and Famous...Brentwood 90049 (or is it *Brentwood Place*?)...every cheesy goddam "true" crime catch-a-criminal audience "participation" eat-my-whanger...celebrity cops vs. celebrity suspect; celebrity good vs. celebrity evil; celebrity prosecution and defense...one more life-assisted falsification of life...one more tweak on the ring through the fucking collective nose of the vast legion of empty U.S. lives (biggest tweak since the frigging Iraq War)...see Super-Spot runL.KEEP IT.

For being the star and patsy, focus and fulcrum, of this screaming mega-circus (or is circus by now too outmoded, too deconstructed, too "real [i.e., unreal] life," a concept?) (are we down in fact to TV as the basic root METAPHOR for everything, period?), I say let the guy go, I don't care what he did if let's say he even maybe did it. He's got constitutional rights — remember them? — they've been violated, totally, absurdly...case closed. (On to the next celebrity pigfuck.) The judge, whoever he is, for letting the current pigfuck go on AS SUCH...heck...where the hell is Theodor Adorno when we need him?

(How many years are we now past the LITERAL end of the world?)

But hey, I'll confess. It's not as if I never cared about O.J.'s, um, celebrity being, that I never paid direct attention to it. I never saw Bronko Nagurski, Red Grange, or Steve Van Buren — I'm not that old. The greatest running backs I've seen are 1. Gale Sayers; 2. Jim Brown; 3. O.J. If he'd played for a better team than the Buffalo Bills of the early '70s, his career would've had more statistical ballast, but in terms of basic field moves and such he would still be number three. Three is fine. Nothing wrong with three. Don't wanna fall in the tabloid trap of shit-for-logjc, shit-for-evidence, but PERHAPS Jim Brown was some kind of role model (Sayers' career was too short to emulate). Jim went Hollywood, he was in his share of crummy movies, and fuggit, he used to beat women. But one thing he never was was bland.

Let's face it: as football commentator, film actor, star of high-visibility commercials, O.J. was my-t-bland. You wanna take it a step further, he was exactly the sort of bland BLACK ex-jock TV is always hiring to be unoutspoken, undangerous. A figure of harmless (yet effective) delegated authority. O.J. the camp counselor-traffic monitor...hawker of products that will not give you cancer of the spleen. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle lists four causes — categories of explanation — one of which (final) is something like end to which action (consciously or un-) is directed. Teleology. Got no idea what the state is offering, specifically, as O.J.'s alleged "motive," but a decent final cause (explanation) — nothing to do with intent, but so much more telling! (though no prosecutor will conceivably use it) — would be; to transcend his blandness. That's as far as I'll "speculate."

You want a soundtrack, though, okay, I'm a whore just like the rest—here's a soundtrack. Soundtracks are about manipulation. (In this case: further manipulation.) Even "high art" uses of music with image serve (or seek) to deliver otherwise undeliverable footage in dotted-line context, to underscore it, italicize it, make it grip (and "move") an intended audience otherwise ungrippable. Godard liked using gratuitous surges of thematically irrelevant (all-too-relevant) music to accentuate (subvert) both its invasiveness and generic necessity. TV's use of virtually ANY audiovisual interplay is inherently evil (a description, not a judgment). The only music-over-visual I'll admit to ever seeing TV handle both benignly and well, one of the few times in fact I've seen the medium use music that wasn't meant to kill, was in New York somewhere in the '70s after the Mets or Yankees — I forget — had just blown a pennant. Over end credits, some local non-network station ran Frank Sinatra singing "Put Your Dreams Away for Another Day" with a shot of a grocer looking out from under his awning in the rain (it had also rained that day— the team lost out of town) — no customers, disappointment, take a breath, sigh, what the hey. Whew. Think of it, meantime, at its customary worst; bank commercials w/ "We've Only Just Begun"; the death of John Lennon w/ (hint! hint!) "Give Peace a Chance"; the mind-thudding, protein-rattling JFK funeral.

So go 'head, make your own evil daily O.J. a/v montage. Mute the sound (do you really wanna hear what the players are saying?), switch channels, and play these as needed or desired to accompany the unfolding "drama"....

If Arthur Honegger's *Rugby*, from 1928, is not really "about" football, don't worry — it's not really about rugby either. No more programmatic than his earlier railroad whoozis, *Pacific 231*, just a lively, uncomplicated, "masculine" eight minutes of lightweight orchestral hoop dee doo.

The stadium version of "Louie, Louie" is without a vocal, but who could ever figure out the lyrics anyway? Just the sort of brassy bombast our suspect would've heard through locker-room walls over umpteen autumns of Sat./Sun. halftime hokum.

Gary Giddins once wrote that *Pithecanthropus Erectus* is about murder, a theme Duke Ellington wouldn't have touched but one which Mingus, the arch Ellingtonian, found easy — although Greg Burk thinks it's more on the level of killing mastodons. Either way it's okay for our purposes: one of the great evocations, anytime, ever, of human — or proto-human — violence.

In the Verdi opera, as in Shakespeare's play, *Otello/Othello* doesn't stab Desdemona, he strangles her, but the racial (i.e., interracial) angle makes it crassly usable. There's a nice sequence in the last act, beginning when he kisses her to wake her so he can

strangle her, continuing to where she's dead; then at the very end when he's blubbing over the body ("How pale you are, and wan and mute and beautiful, good creature born under an evil star") — cuts 13 and 15.

Once again, the narrator/protagonist of Neil Young's "Down by the River" hasn't stabbed his baby, this time he's shot her, but the tune itself is too good to pass up. "Be on your side or be on my side": the wages of me/you right/wrong are quite the same as those often assigned by certain factions to sin. Great "death" guitar, or is it guilt (remorse) guitar?

With *Pagliacci* we're getting closer. Stabbing; stabbing of a second person, male (though specifically the first stabbee's lover); confusion of levels (performance/life, etc.). But skip Canio's famous soliloquy and go instead with his late second-act rant 'bout how his "manhood claims its rights again," his "bleeding heart needs blood to wash away the shame," then Nedda's "I never knew you were so frightening" riff, followed by Canio's "Do you still not understand that I will not give you up?" — some intense shit — culminating in two snuffs and all the various levels at last one: "The play is over." (Tracks 8 and 9.)

Joe Turner said it, not me: "I ain't never loved / And I hope I never will / 'Cause a lovin' proposition / Gonna get somebody killed" — love equals death, y'see? Could the Bard himself have expressed it so neatly? With some fine "sexual" trombone by Lawrence Brown.

Even with the death penalty ruled out, *Marche au supplice* (March to the Scaffold), the fourth movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, is a pretty good take on the momentum of the accused to oblivion, the bleak inevitability of punishment: full speed ahead! No way out! Though the middle gets a little grandiloquent, sounding almost like "The Marseillaise," it begins fine and ends fine — a drum roll and then...that's that.

Even grimmer is the march that opens Mahler's *Fifth*, a relentless and merciless slam HOME: the home whose gaping maw awaits our celeb at the end (perhaps) of his max-lengthy stay in a cage, just as it awaits us all at the end of our imprisonment in this here some-call-it-life. Or it could play after the fact as Mrs. Simpson's *Trauermarsch*, that's right, funeral march.

From O.J.'s p.o.v., on the other hand, you've got the thorny issue of unjust imprisonment, the subject of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, with its massive, almost manic-depressive mood swings. While the overture is a real rouser, a Bastille-rattler, the prelude to the second act is a monstrous downer, setting shop in

a dark dungeon where Florestan lies in chains, moaning, "*Gott! welch ' Dunkel hier!*"— whatever that means (this version has no libretto), though the poor wretch is clearly displeased with his conditions of confinement. There's also a couple dandy prisoner chorus numbers, expressing first their joy at being allowed out in the sun ("*O welche Lust*"— first CD, selection 14) and then their dismay at being sent back to their cells by the evil Don Pizarro ("*Leb wohl, du warmes Sonnenlicht*" — second CD, first selection).

A good track for the O.J. defense team, whatever its hand (house?) of cards may turn out to be, or for all-purpose cut-and-shuffle, back and forth, the whole courtroom number, *Jeu de cartes* is one of Stravinsky's better neo-classical whatsems, a 1937 ballet for people dressed as, dig it, cards.

And if he gets off (y'never know, right?), you can't beat "I'm Set Free" by the Velvets: "I saw my head laughin' / Rolling on the ground / And now I'm set free-ee / I'm set free-ee!"

And every break for a commercial or lunch or the news of the so-called rest o' the world should have as its ID the Sonny Rollins version of "There's No Business Like Show Business." Nobody deadpans, or mock-deadpans, a standard like Sonny, the great ironist, or is he the great literalist? — no diff here. ■

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer on the 1900s

Final notes on the only century we've got for another week

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Dec. 23, 1999](#)

Cover Stories



Moby Grape, in whose behalf Columbia pulled the inane grandstand play of simultaneously releasing five singles, thus dooming the truly terrific LP.

- **MY CENTURY, YOUR CENTURY**
- **BOBO OLSON'S CENTURY**
- Century's short
- but centuries long
- should be
- limited.
- — "Microwave,"
- William Carlos Williams



[It ended abruptly around 1970, or slightly earlier. '69 would be a good likely date. If you were born after that and care about such biz, too bad — and too bad, yes, 'cause it is too bad — but everything since then has just been Out There somewhere, off the frigging Map. After the century and its representatives tossed it all away.

DOES OLSON FEAR GAVILAN?

By Casey

WES

THE RING

Boxing in the Ring

Wesley

Wesley

Wesley

Wesley

Wesley

Wesley



The century where it all went to hell — but WHAT went to hell?

Where the means were found to sweep all wisdom, all true sass, and most (if not quite literally all) beauty under the rug, to brush it off humankind's underwear.



Where the distance between the real and the acceptably fake narrowed and narrowed to functional insignificance.

New new NEW, lotsa freaking



NEW, but ultimately (and merely): new bread, new circuses, new repression.

But nothing as utterly new, as new w/out historical precedent, as terminal closure. Termination 4-ever. Although Burroughs used to claim it closed, ending all real earthly Possibility, in the 18th century. Or was it the 17th? Dunno. (You could ask him if he weren't dead.)

So many, so-o-o many things happening only to unhappen; to be trivialized and marginalized by failure, success, and the oversight of Crowd Control Central (which

you bet your ass exists); to undercut their own being, deflavor and denature their own act, to wet-tissue-paper nullity. And I ain't just talking rock rock rock and ROLL...



On the shortlist of things/lost, or even not-lost (and possibly lookin' quite healthy), but still g-g-GONE:

The NF faking L (NB faking A) (March — ha ha ha — Madness).

Boxing as an event staged in venues other than cow pastures.



Wrestling, for crying out loud.

Hollywood, anyone? (Independent cinema, ditto.)

Did I hear the word "journalism"?

TV. TV? Tee veer?

Democracy as even a phantom cliché tendered as a sop to rubes {still the major mega-demographic}.

Cultural liberation. Sexual freedom. Civil, y'know, rights. Public...what was it?...education.

Anybody in the house remember graduated income tax?



Watergate, by golly. What'd it lead to besides Nixon being SAINTED? (Century of the Bully.)

Marx proven right! And right ON! Again and again and AGAIN! (You bet your mom's rosy ass he was.)

Capitalism (which in endgame = Hedonism) and Puritanism: two nasty trains, always running, but nowrunning in sync: the scare of nastier, more existentially calamitous mortifications (like another Depression, or nuclear snuff-out, or no more dirty mags) to keep us neurotic, force us to settle for less dire plights and lower-yield varieties of (ever more expensive) symptomatic relief.







PROPHECY AND POSTPHECY

"2000 Man" — who'd have thunk it?



What seemed at the time like a bit of comic relief, a topical joke on side one of Their Satanic Majesties Request, the Rolling Stones' entry (11/67) in the Sgt. Pepper overproduction sweepstakes, now reads like one of the great, and maybe the last great, documents of future-think.



"My name is a number, a piece of plastic film"... "I am having an affair with a random computer"... even a dose of multip/unetary multiculturalism: "Oh Daddy, proud of your planet; oh Mommy, proud of your sun" — how's that for prescience?



Who'd've thought such a lampoon of future-think would come to pass so quickly, so thoroughly — or was it a truism even then? — and nobody'd even be snickering?

And that other more-than-date: 1984.



By which time, compared to the hand history had actually dealt, "1984" (the concept) had become a mild little what-are-you-complaining-about?, the Orwell vision having been superseded by something far more weasely and malevolent. Big Mean Uncle certainly did watch you, but more than that you were watching him (his 8-ring circuses, his news and commercials, his Master Program), addictedly, on a monitor YOU paid for. (More effective and cost-effective.)



And the year itself, diggit: Reagan had to be Prez; the Olympics had to be staged in L.A. (Vegas wasn't ready yet). There was no irony left in the world.



A year later, when Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* came out, a reviewer or two copped to its taking place, perhaps, in not so much the future as an alternate present, but nobody picked up on it as a film in fact about the past—1965, say—a time when Control was still analog, and occasionally (in both theory and practice) fallible. A nostalgic little period piece.



AS I LAY DEAD (CHAPTER FROM A NOVEL THE CENTURY WOULD NOT LET ME
FINISH)



It's 2035. I've been dead 30 years. Welcome to my treasure trove. My hand-chiseled mausoleum. You and eight or nine others have stumbled in here: lots of goodies, take 'em and enjoy! And take your merry time, they ain't going anywhere. Where the hell were you when I was alive?

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Ah! the thudding frustration of “slipping through the cracks” — “dying invisible”—or even worse: being branded a “cult writer” (whatever that is. Sounds like caves and dungeons. Moonlight); the bitter exhaustion of having to cheer-lead my own act, my so-called career (why do we strive? why do we strive?). Luck was never mine. Whatever could go wrong, did. You don’t need a sob story. Not the complete one. Now that it’s over, what’s the diff? What ever was the diff?

But anyway, come in, take your shoes off, probe and grope me. While I was alive I didn’t care much for the notion of scoring — being “discovered” — after I died. It means nothing to me now. “Me” doesn’t exist, not anymore, “I” don’t either, and “we” never did.

Don’t wanna sound like a frigging solipsist (I die...it's over...I take it all with me), it has nothing to do with such biz. Obviously life goes on — the last reader isn’t dead yet — so here’s how we maybe should play it: I was generous then (i.e., now: my now), always gave the whole wad away, squandered my fluids on writerly whims with but the most esoteric of payoffs, spent 5-6-7 years on books that didn’t get me laid, didn’t earn me a can of clams, and the bounty of that generosity lingers on. If I can have a corpse, if I can be a corpse, so can my work...consider it dead. Bountifully. Does death fascinate you?

(While we’re on the subject, I soft of doubt my corpse wishes were heeded: to be left naked in the street for the flies to feed on. Please be sure my grave is kept clean.)

Anyway, here ‘tis: a gen’rous helping of smut, rant, provocative grocery lists, reviews of wrestling and lubricated condoms, bon mots, lively filler, evidence galore of the author’s having ripped the eyes off his face, ripped the skin from his bones and poked it with an icepick, hammered the bones with a claw hammer, lopped them with poultry shears...a carload of fine “stuff” from a deadman who knew how!

Hey, I was a contender — almost — in the final uneasy days of writing as we the still-living know, er, knew it. Or am I lucky I ever got published at all?

None of which exactly matters, y’understand, but it can still be a pisser, still living, to live with it. The taint of “failure.” Non-recognition. Something almost like “shame.” A cheesy burden on waking consciousness.

And why do we strive? Why in the face of setbacks and etc. there aren't sticks (bats) (clubs) enough to shake at, do we persist in believing it matters? Damned if I know. (Don't give me any hogwash 'bout the "indomitability of the human spirit.")

Listen, I grew up at a time when TV was new.. none in my home till I was five years old. Imagine such a world (a world also without rock-n-roll). Now you're probably six steps beyond laser discs — I'm talking your now. Do "novels" exist anymore? Books as such (without compulsory audio/video/smellorama)? Is "text" just something you at your option download off a CD-ROM, database X or the Internet, or what-ever's replaced them? (Do eyes exist anymore? Do teeth?) This is not a science-fiction novel. Or maybe it is. I don't care if you don't.

In any event, behold the document: a "kitchen sink" (as we might once have called it) of life-wish and death-wish and grandiloquent nullity.. a swag chest knee-deep in glowing all-for-naught.. a rich accumulation of aromatic dust.

Early in the final decade of the last century, I got interviewed for a French documentary about a 1960s band called the Doors. Their singer was hot shit for a while. "How," I was asked, "would you describe the sexuality they projected?" Well, I told the guy, making it up as I went along, it wasn't basic rock whiteboy sex of either the '50s or '60s, it wasn't black, y'know, R&B sex, the blues, and it wasn't British-style androgyny or anything especially kinky or even all that topically macho. It wasn't specifically any of that so much as — well — it seemed from this end, seeing them in this crummy little club every night, like nothing less than a musical evocation of MY OWN —.

May this heap-o-pulp likewise serve as the ur-expression of YOUR vanity. A foretaste of your own aftertaste, of your own extinction. Don't be shy: use me. I don't mind at all being useful. Let my legacy be your legacy. .

Personally, I don't think the CIA killed JFK, and the first click in my head after something reminds me of his snuffout is its position, of all things, in sequence with the rebirth of rock and roll. The snuff occurred in November '63, late, and by the dawning of '64 rock was back again, full force, after being dead in the water since 1958. Really, trust me on this, that was the sequence, one two, bing bing, in the consciousness/mindset of callow American whiteys my age (18-19) — I was THERE, believe it.

Anyway, back again: doing its trademark mind-body-heart-soul redemption number: the second flowering of rock-roll as such, as an officially so-named whatsit, or if we're talkin' real history (or izzit prehistory?), counting the '20s — Delta blues —

as the first, and postwar Chicago as the second, early '50s R&B as third, maybe throw in '40s jump blues too, we're looking at possibly the fifth or sixth time it happened (no sweat, tho — it worked): but in any case also its LAST flowering (punk as long as it was punk was something else).

But flower and flame it did, and no matter how you slice or critique it, by '65-'66 it was like this torch held high in the World — as bright as your proverbial 10 thousand suns — which in congress with certain other factors more or less formed the mid to late 1960s — where, regardless of what Clinton and his ilk would prefer you to believe, something, as they say, OCCURRED.

The frigging SIXTIES! — the buzzword, the stereotype, the noumena and phenomena! — plenty of bullshit, too, of course (too knee jerk an Us-versus-Them, too fat and specific a brand-new style sheet) — but what did happen was elemental and massive, involving tens of millions of people, a third (easy), maybe even half, of the youth of America, in a just-say-no to too many things to grocery list here, and a hogwild hell-yes to even more.

If you wanted to, heck, you could try and isolate a few of the chickens and eggs, some primary causal "culprits." Drugs (natch). Consciousness as a tangible whoozit (and nascent Force). Probably some residual sadness (cynicism) over Kennedy. The ur-loathsomeness of tootoomuch mainstreamamerican life (revealed!) (along with the means, and the warrant, to burn every BRIDGE to it). The hoodoo of the too-long "forbidden," its allure magnified by context to the breaking point: forbidden no more. The demotion of God (from boss to player) in the court of the cosmic and eternal. A provisional end to manymost variants of Judaeo-Christian guilt. Vietnam, the last war with a draft (fear of death at its most functional) gave the whole show mega-sufficient urgency and gravity, but England and Canada didn't have 'Nam, and it happened there just as elementally, and maybe even as massively.

And one of the most telling, and most underrecognized, aspects of the whole business is kids, the cognoscenti, having better, livelier things t' do, DIDN'T WATCH TELEVISION.

What they did was hang out with friends, play records, smoke reefer and take pills, stay up all night, carry on, meet and greet the world, and if all else failed they might have turned a TV on with the sound off, smoked more reefer and GOOFED ON IT. (These wags nowadays who wanna claim TV helped radicalize people in the '60s — news pics of action in the War, for inst — are only looking at a sampling of Old Squares too numb and dumb to have "known" such stuff without the see-Spot-run — not the already converted.)

Oh, and it didn't end suddenly somewhere towards the end of the decade — "decades" have nothing to do with anything, and certainly nothing to do with this— but in increments, and by sections. The rock side of things — the torch held high — was hanging much less high by the three-quarter point of '67. Corporatization was rapid-fire and crass. "They can't bust our music," read a Columbia Records promo for several of the bands in their "stable," including the hapless Moby Grape (in whose behalf they pulled the inane grandstand play of simultaneously releasing five singles, thus dooming the truly terrific LP from which they were culled). Too many labels across the board signed (and would never stop signing) too many bands. MGM tried to pull off an "instant scene," the Bosstown Sound — Boston, y'dig? — featuring such happy hokum as Ultimate Spinach. "Alternative culture" came to mean nothing more, nothing less, than alternative product (in the same old, if resized and repainted, marketplace).

Even before the '68 Democratic Convention, before even Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy got shot, the political wing— the "Movement," the "Revolution" (ha ha ha), and more concrete (and practical) manifestations like the Panthers — was already gimpy and staggering under the weight of reactive brutality and internal frustration, coupled with diminished ideology. "Purity" is never an easy stance to maintain.

When at last it finally did end, it was clear it was over. Thuddingly. By the spring-summer of '69 (*Easy Rider*, say, then the Moonwalk), everything in counter-land was down the tubes, the toilet, sixty feet under, and with it the last vestige of interest ('cept to necrophiles, archivists and profiteers) this century. Events after that, from within and without, were just nails in coffins, coffins, too many coffins to count. And Manson had nothing to do with it.

Anyway, I don't think the CIA killed JFK (with a chessplaying org so concerned with Control, it's hard to believe you would take the KING, and I don't mean Camelot, off the chess-board — especially one whose politics were prob'ly more their own than their founder Truman's, for inst — and expect to retain the social order...like he was one of our more RIGHTWING postwar presidents, f 'r godsakes, and one so natural to the PR of it all — the source of Reagan! — he had the masses considering him "liberal," a populist, how absurd.. as to a "splinter group," some bun-cha renegades, acting independently —against the dominant Agency grain—you've gotta imagine there would've been repercussions, retribution and whatnot, heads would have rolled or at least bounced, conspicuously.. and mustn't Kennedy have had his PARTISANS inside the Agency? Wouldn't there have been some ripples of reaction from them?...anti-Castro Cubans as perps? — while meanwhile, way after the Bay of Pigs, which the Agency botched, not him, he'd never lost his enthusiasm for KILLING

CASTRO — checking the agency's progress towards which was a daily task assigned to brother Bobby — I'm not sure why we're s'posed to believe the Cuban faction wasn't a party to, or at least privy to, that number.. as to the need to even shoot the prez, make a martyr out of him for whatever the hell he was or wasn't, there had to've been e-z ways to neutralize and subdue him — photos of him "doing" Marilyn? — if in fact there was much of anything to subdue...heck, if the Agency, if some agency, had a hand in undoing Nixon w/out murdering his weird ass, why the need for bullets with Kennedy?...not to mention he was a literal IVY LEAGUER like manymost of them, an elite goddam player from the getgo, unlike Ike/Dick/Harry/et cetera ...whereas the prospect of, say, the Mafia — some mob guy whose girlfriend Johnny mighta diddled — committing the deed, eh, now that seems eminently credible), yet they certainly didn't waste any time TAKING CREDIT for the deed (so future idiots like Carter and Clinton would be certain they'd done it and never risk "stepping out of line" during their own presidencies), doctoring and creating evidence to the point where relatively little of it, especially the sort of "new evidence" still surfacing at this late remove from the event, is to be trusted; nor do I believe in Conspiracy Theory in general.

Very few designated conspiracies, in fact, would seem to be the outcome of collaborative intrigues, of confederates sitting down at a table, planning you do this, you do that, and together we'll fuck with history, by gum — they're usually just the inevitable consequence of manypeople — way beyond those at any and all conceivable tables — being simply on the SAME TEAM. Like Foucault, I don't think you need sinister coalitions willfully scheming anything— whole entire SHITLOADS of folks who'll never meet are already on the same team, and the way teams do their thing hasn't changed much since the dawn of civilization. Did Reagan have to "ask" Hollywood to make the cultural cornerstones of his presidency (the enlistment films of the post-braindead multi-decade), *Rambo* and *Top Gun* — or even, for that matter, the soft-sell slop of *Stripes*? Was it really necessary to bean-count heads in "both" parties to guess the upshot of Clinton's "impeachment"? Did Bonnie Raitt need to be "cajoled" into vacating the bench of that other team, the long-in-a-slump Peace Team, to lend her careerist "support" to the we-love-our-boys-in-the-Gulf fandango? (Or might it be, apropos of how a fellow sing-songer had put it, that she jus' wanted to be on the side that appeared, for the moment, t' be winning?)

There are, however, some historical scenarios that look too, too scripted, where unscripted is extremely implausible — as if, well, some well-oiled think-tank or somesuch MUST HAVE conceived, coddled, brought them to fruition. "Been responsible" in an originaive sense. In this category I put MTV.

Fact: the '60s, whatever did or did not (in reality) go down, scared the shit out of lotsa people in lotsa pockets of power and privilege, your so-called "entrenched" interests, including the grim-grey forces of Death-over-Life per se (you know them). Fear. Trembling. A taste of vulnerability (for the previously invulnerable). Were instilled.

Is it plausible that such slaphappy fuckers, their "world" thus threatened, would hesitate a second, once the threat had passed, in tossing 'round the big-bucks, funding to the TEETH any and all nefarious efforts to insure that nothing similar would ever go down again? — or at the very least, failing to achieve such omnipotence, and since accidents do happen, to see to it that some failsafes be in place to limit the damage? — is it plausible they'd pass THAT up?

Enter: one or more mercenary "study groups," gaggles of amoral brain-stormers — pay 'em, they'll without compunction piss on any world including their own. If happyfolks at the Rand Corporation (as we later were told) dropped acid and sat around discussing ways of winning nuclear war — fun & games w/ the Apocalypse — imagine what a hoot some favored colleagues had in running down the psychedelic '60s.

And a prime ensuing "project," it sez here, was to make sure the youth of America got its full dose of TV like ev'ryone else (come rain or shine).

Becuz' here were these pricks who (upon reflection, and after research) DID notice how many kids had passed on "the tube" from such a date to such a date. And why didn't they watch? For starters, the obvious: the sorry dearth of televised rock on a regular basis. There was all the Dick Clark shit, sure — ersatz till you puke — and occasional name guests on *Ed Sullivan* or *The Smothers Brothers*, but nothing to set your watch by. As a youth sop, *Mod Squad* fooled no one with two-tenths of a brain (and it didn't have cameos by actual bands). (Only 8-year-olds watched *The Monkees*.)

Needed: a viable means of both showcasing and neutralizing (compromising) a steady stream of frontline rock on the home screen.

So however these things work.. .seeds planted.. .circumstances tweaked.. .record companies goosed (dig this new marketing tool)...a slow, steady groundswell of greed fomented.. .advertisers felt up and out (let 'em think it's their idea).. .greasing the wheels (c'mon, somebody greased 'em — y'don't buy the MTV "instant success story," do ya?)...say, isn't that former Monkee Michael Nesmith over there?...until

finally, early '80s, here 'tis: an actual rock-roll channel Network. Crowd control module. Whatever.

By which time, in the wake of punk having bit the dust, then circled back itself t' join the marketplace, rock on its own was already not about redemption (or liberation) (or empowerment) or anything close, and couldn't wait to comply: the wundaful world-o-videos. (Monkee-ization of the whole shebang.) When the frigging MINUTEMEN did a vid you knew it was completely over. The commercial, the come-on, was the product, the thingie, the "art form." Where once there had at least been a semblance of polarity, of a dialectic (the Big Score vs. unbridled Whoopee Per Se), now you had none. Rock and the marketplace were indivisibly one, no separation, not even an argument, just like TV and the 'place: an early warning that dialectical materialism (as we knew it on earth) would soon give way to unrepentant MATERIALISM. For the rest of our lifetimes, anyway.

FINE TIME TO BE BORN

Couldn't be finer.

May 11, 1945. Dizzy Gillespie's "Salt Peanuts" is recorded in New York. Though not the original version, this is the ONE, with players including not only Charlie Parker but Sid Catlett, arguably the greatest drummer jazz has produced (more sizzling in context, it could be shown, than Elvin Jones at his Coltrane-era best), and it's probably produced more great-great A-1 drummers than A-1 alto sax players. Parker, 24, the highwater mark for alto, jazz's most mind-blowing soloist (any instrument), and prob'ly the greatest musician (period) ever to record a note, would be dead in less than 10 years. Gillespie, a more cautious breed of hellion, would live to perform "Salt Peanuts" at the White House, with guest vocal by once and future peanut farmer Jimmy Carter great moments in kitsch.

I'm one day old.

If I'd been born just two days earlier, my parents would later claim, they'd've named me Victor — for V-E Day — lucky me.

And luckier still for THIS, and its ilk, to have been the music vibrating the air, if not down the block then close enough, in the very town where I entered this life, though it would be 17 years (during one of rock's major down times) before I would fortuitously get t' hear it: frenzied, frenetic, frantic — stop, start, fly, floop, over and out — go 'head, call it nutty. But not nutty like Spike Jones, or *Hellzapoppin* or a Bugs Bunny cartoon: nutty like a miracle in the wilderness.

NUTTY, RECENT, WHITE

Twenty anagrams for "Twentieth Century":

THERE WENT UNCITY T. (Trumancapoteville: g-g-g-gone!); HENCE U RENT TWITTY (y'need Conway for a party, so you pay for him); WHUTTEN-C ETERNITY? (what endless import, 10 centuries? — "millennia" debunked); IRENE NETTY "T.W." CHUT (1914-76, proponent of "tough weakness" therapy for substance abuse); TENT-CUT THY WIENER (so sayeth Leviticus, one O.T. scholar insists); W.C.T.E.: 'NUTHER ENTITY? (is the Women's-Christian Temperance Enfederation really diff Vent from their Union?); HY TRICE WENT T UTNE (Hyman Trice, co-founder of the *Utne Reader*, went there straight from *McCall's*); WET TEN-INCH RYE TUT (medium-size Egyptian novelty bread, after the rain); TENTH WETT-URINE CY. (nine, make that ten cyclopes, consecutive, whose pee ain't dryy); CHEWY TINT-NET — TRUE (no lie about edible colored women's hose); TUNNEY ET IT W/ "H" CERT (Gene followed lobster with a heroin-flavor breath mint); HEY, T.R. WENT T' TUNECI (no shit: Teddy Roosevelt attended classes at the Technical Univ. of Northeast Connecticut, Illimantic); NEUTER THE WITTY N.C. (Noel Coward should be desexed, humorless critics contend); TEEN WINE TRUTH: C.Y.T. (choose your toxin, kids); TWIN TRUENCY TEETH (geez: she cut school twice t' visit the dentist!); RECENT N.U. WYETH TIT (exceptional breast painting by Andy Wyeth's unheralded cousin, Napoleon Ulysses Wyeth); WUTHERIN' TENCTETY (Emily Bronte's turgid, yet still unpublished, sequel to *Wuthering Heights*); T. IN THE EYE, 'TWURN'T "C" ('twas only English Breakfast, not cancer); TUNE THE Y. WIRE (CTNT) (made-for-Cana-dian-cable film o' the year for '93)...

RAUNCH CORRELATION

Obviously, centuries don't exist. Not like days, nights, seasons, or years do.

Ten fingers (Caesar had them, as do we), hence the decimal system.

In long retrospect or short, sequences, chronologies, linkages could doubtless be otherwise. All ascription of the squawk of moment, of its raunch correlation with neighboring moments (and the longer haul), more than, oh, two years after the fact is purely revisionist.

It so happens the 20th ends now. If it ended in 1956 or '57, unencumbered by the anathema such truck would entail today, we could conceivably be discussing, even in this exalted weekly, gross inanities like GREAT CHICKS (HOT BROADS) (BOSS BABES) OF THE CENTURY (Josephine Baker.. .Harlow.. .Lana.. .Ava ...your ballot on

page 52!); might even be proposing, in the afterglow of her lurid bump through *The Girl Can't Help It* (co-starring Little Richard), Jayne Mansfield as THE manwoman of the whole cha-cha-cha.

Is there not something grossly revisionist, in a very real sense, that only a current menu of options — contexts — perspectives is “legitimately” considered?

THE TOWEL

Complicity.

We all comply at times in our own undoing.

Lots-o-people in most lines of etc. have thrown in the towel, but for writers to have done it as early as they did was a particularly bad omen, a foretoken of just how quickly and nastily all the dominoes would fall.

Sheesh... it's downright tragic.

Writepersons, who at least in theory should know better, and who dealing in words and ideas and such crap — keepers as they are of the oldest flame going: the flame of MEANING — bear a certain, uh, responsibility for and to the welfare of all livingthings, well they shoulda knowed right off the bat what it meant.

Publishers of newspapers & mags, to save money, make things “go faster,” started firing typesetters, and the writers for these rags became typesetters, what they turned in was already set, but no savings or perks of any sort were passed on to them. Editors, editing on these little screens, fucked up more than before, stupider typos, more ridiculous line breaks, as copy routinely got mangled. The only side of writing that one could argue had been improved was the clerical side (hey, y'mean I don't gotta retype? it'll check my spelling? — gosh), never the creative side.

Nor the economic side. Where once all anyone needed t' write was a pencil, suddenly you had to INVEST IN all this ugly machinery, the equivalent of a washer-dryer-airconditioner. And that dickety-dack typer that'd served your techno needs— manual; electric even a Selec-tric — well it won't write to disc or double as a printer, so chuck it: a useless antique.

In '91, after being told by every paper I worked for that if I didn't submit copy on disc I would hafta come in and retype it into their computer anyway, I succumbed to the

coercion and bought my first computer. Not wanting to be distracted by superfluous opticals — I'm a writer, 's not a hobby, don't insult me with toys— I got a monochrome monitor. My first impression was of having to drive to work — to work at home. A bleary-eyed commuter. It made the process of writing so unpleasant that the genesis of paragraphs, pages, pieces ultimately took me longer.

Today, with e-mail and the Internet and truckloads of unwanted "applications" and vid-games and Zip drives and scanners and all the standard compulsory whatnot — shit I don't want, and don't want to need— it feels like I've bought this car that was out of my range, and I also had to shell out for 7000 teddy bears and a million pairs of purple socks and a 300-year subscription to Field and Stream. Ninety-nine percent superfluity. (Every second I'm sitting at the fucker, I feel like I've been HAD.)

"Personal" computers: nobody needs th'm. It isn't about need! Well, animators for the graphics on *Monday Night Football* need th'm, but FUCK the animation on *Monday Night Football*. The world would go on fine without it.

Coercion. Fooling ostensibly all of the people closer, ever closer, to all of the time. Soon we'll be expected to pay our goddam bills online, and if y'ain't on it yourself you'll have to subscribe to a service that does it for you. How long before we gotta pay to breathe? Don't know your take on this madness, but it's the bitter END of mammal life as I used to know it.

The stations of my loathing...

I basically haven't watched TV news since 1980, or about the time Jimmy Carter reinvented the Cold War, table-setting the Reagan years. The fraudulence of this prick's daily TV PERFORMANCE, the sick macho gesture of an Annapolis wuss who'd used coverage of Three Mile Island (him in a space-suit) to prime the pump — this to me was what the Cuban Missile Crisis had been to others... never again. My decision wasn't driven by escapism — an attempt to avoid knowing "what was going on." I simply no longer wanted any part of Master Control's by-the-numbers show & tell — the sights, the sounds, the easy trifling with every sinew of our being.

Likewise, with computers, it is not bad enough that they exist and are heinous and more or less mandatory. Knowing that is merely knowing that, but to SEE its ubiquitous face is to BE THERE yourself, witness to the SAME pinks, luminous greys, cerulean blues, all the dings and donges from cyber hell, which constitute the universal workspace of the damned, lockstepping to the horror, the horror.

A future-vision straight out of Disney, or to be precise, Disneyland the original weekly series. Several times each, they'd served up pap from Fantasyland, Frontierland, and Adventureland before Finally, in '54 or '55, they aired the first Tomorrowland segment — some unremarkable animations of space flight shown-and-told by Werner von Braun. With much cash, effort, and national sacrifice, said the denazified Nazi of the hour, we might make it to the moon by the year 2000.. .ooh, wouldn't *dass* be *wunderbar*.

Well, they never did get us there, the bastards, but they also never lost the prerock fiftiesness of the dream, which they assault us with today WITHOUT MERCY: Eisenhowerland!: whitebread *uber alles*!: thesauruses w/out the word "shit"!: mall-world before malls. A perfect formica simulation, now that they don't even make that stuff no mo' — that's what I see on MY so-called desktop (don't know 'bout yours). On which must be endured an endless procession of ads for shit I don't want/need/wanna know about. Every screaming icon is a product i.d. How long before you click on "save" and there's an ad for some bank?

All this "virtual" bullticky — addresses that aren't addresses, access that isn't access, e-mail "relationships" — is an imitation-of-life more ludicrous (and hideous) than made-for-TV movies of the '70s and '80s. "User friendly," what a laugh — as bogus as "have

MISSING TYPE

aimed at more than a quaint li'l studio audience: the stay-at-home sporting masses, bub!

Our first taste of such as STANDARD MALICIOUS BROADCAST PROCEDURE

1920

A very early warning.

In his first novel, the *Less than Zero* of its time, F. Scott Fitzgerald plays the hole card of socialism, only his socialism is quitelike fascism, and not just the way it might transmute into something like fascism, y'know down the road, like when Stalin would go and do all these purges (and pogroms) in an excess of institutional whatever, but fascism already, originally, pretty much by definition.

In short order, *This Side of Paradise* would sell 2 million copies, a prototype of the literary killing for ages-to-come of young American doodoohs, and make its author (the emperor's new clothes of mock-modernist trend-think; jock-sniffer to the Rich decades before Capote, Tom Wolfe, or P.J. O'Rourke, debaser of the concept of "jazz" before it was even a third of a concept; grandfather, godfather—or simply harbinger? — of the Yuppie).

Imagine the play he'd've got on *Entertainment Tonight* or PBS. 'S a good thing, in those days, only the literate were subject to such crap.

CONSPIRACIES (2)

Why do you think Nixon abolished the draft? Not from compassion, that's for sure. No draft = no draft resistance. Or much resistance, or protest — as opposed to mere objection — to anything, really. Why do you think there's no perceptible leftist presence, nor even much of a politics, among the formerly draftable (18 and up) anymore?

AIDS. Not too many're claiming anymore it was custom-designed — scientists (outside of fiction) just ain't that ingenious — or even, especially, that somebody in fact invented it. It would still seem, however, that at some point, by hook or by crook — "accident"? "discovery"? "engineering"? — whoever they were had something on their hands, this virus, this bug — what t' do with it? First off, let's see what it can do — who'll we test it on?

And why does it seem likely it was tested? 'Cuz epidemiologically, ha, there apparently is NO WAY (contrary to the usual "explanation") for AIDS to have gone from being a hetero-sexually based epidemic (in Africa) to a homosexual one (in the U.S., "via Haiti" — or so the story went) as rapidly as it did. It isn't even a longshot — it's off the actuarial page. Demographic breakdowns on early HIV distribution — the earliest hints of outbreak — point, out of all proportion, to recipients of an experimental hepatitis B vaccine tested exclusively on gay U.S. men, and of a tainted batch of smallpox vaccine administered by health workers in Africa. Tested, in other words, on a pair of population groups — blacks and gays — deemed expendable.

From genocide to mass-manipulating the living. Once the virus was out there, the policy among the elite that knew{however much or little) was to let it flourish, reveal nothing that might prove helpful in saving a life or umpteen thousand. If junkies and hookers were soon getting sick, fine, that's cool — who needs either o' them, either? By which point new malevolents were "joining" the plot, hopping the bandwagon, to

make damnsure there would be no needle exchanges, no free condoms, no encouraging people to just beat off already, no advice to anyone except just say no, and by all means keep away from queers — demonized this time around as the source of pestilence. (And what, pray tell, is the Ameri-Christian beef with homosexuality? That it is, bottom line, from their tight-assed perspective, *prima facie* sexual — the very word conjures up images of sex acts—sperm flying all over the place — while the fact of Donnie Osmond, say, as a professed heterosexual evokes nothing.) When the band wag reached its broadest mass-media phase, the evil got more omni-directed, and the goal, clearly, became one of trying to SCARE THE SEX OUT OF EVERYONE. Hedonism = freedom...fuh...it'd gone on long enough. One custom-designed consequence: an upswing in hetero monogamy — gee, how sweet — to nudge the birth rate up another notch.

Disposable diapers. As the '60s were waning, the American birth rate was at a postwar low. This at a moment when young'uns were fucking like crazy — and abortion was still, in most places, illegal — so how to 'splain it? More important, how for corporate America to overcome it?—to reattach babies to the sex urge?—get some economic mileage out of orgaz and ejaculation? Whaddaya think the REAL objection to abortion is in high U.S. places? Squeezing votes from the most easily led of constituencies is small potatoes — there s always other ways, too many ways, to pull those people's chains. Nah, chalk it up to corporate greed. Corporations always want MORE mouths to feed, and bodies to dress, and suburban commuters to sell cars and gas and garage door openers to, and more occasions to market symptomatic relief to more sufferers from a life more inhospitable every day. If it ain't more, it's as bad as less. Plus: more unwanted (and unterminated) pregnancies means more neurosis in the world, which means more consumers consuming neurotically, thus micro-manageably, on corporate dotted lines.

For the record: starting during Reagan's first term, and no diff due to a Democrat taking office, the U.S. has done its utmost to dismantle every third-world birth control program it helped initiate in the first place. Keep 'em hungry, keep 'em needy, sell 'em more and bigger Bruce Willis movies— keep those debtor nations under our boot! The Population Explosion, that late-'50s cause celebre — when there were only two billion people in the world — what ever happened to THAT? (And don't tell me Ben & Jerry name flavors for it.)

So anyway...births... '60s...down...how come? And somewhere on the massive list of "reasons" some research outfit ultimately compiled — way, way after the important stuff you can't do much about, in some cases 'cause you caused it, oh, like the unlivability of life (/know at this stage of decay on the planet); the basic expansion of people's moral conscience over their parents' (the karma stops here); the

magnanimous avoidance of the sheer ego-puke of "my son, my daughter...mein kampf"; the polygamization of p.o.v. (even if you're only sequentially lining up alternate partners, offspring complicate breakup and mobility); the cost of baby food, baby shoes, the cost of.. .college (none o' that gettin' cheaper); a simple, basic refusal to get sucked in, go with the program (better to stick your nose in a garbage disposal) — down near the bottom had to be diapers: who wantsa deal with 'em? To dissuade that marginal minipercent to whom such b.s. might somehow be a deciding factor, voila:

Disposable diapers (but won't they pollute the earth?) — who could ask for anything more?

Since then we've had ovarian vogue.. .the culture of babying... 10 billion baby films.. .a population increase of 45 million (U.S. alone). Dominoes, anyone?

RED HERRING OF THE CENTURY

Child abuse. Child abuse?

All parenting is abuse. (Sure as meat is murder, property is theft.)

Physical abuse bothers you? Well, what about spiritual abuse?

My idea of a major felony: inflicting on a child, age 0-12, the concept of heaven and hell. Especially hell.

"Teaching" a kid hell oughta be worth a mandatory minimum of 20, no, 30 years. On a chain gang. No lunch breaks. (Don't let nobody say I'm soft on crime.)

In its sorry, sordid end run, has "religious freedom" as practiced in this country ever done much more than buck up the right, the compulsion!, of various afflicted grownups to perpetuate the germplasm of whatever strain of fire-and-brimstone they themselves were once branded with, Le., to inflict their ongoing dogma on innocent, unmolded lumps of dough? And what of the rights of goddam dough? Where are all our "victim's rights" advocates on this one?!

If Satanism, whatever the bloody hell, in theory or practice, that even is (though a 'ligion, like all others, f'r sure), can be systematically denied Constitutional protection, then phuck its hand-in-glove "opposite" number.

(Crowd control in the ozone, crowd control from hell.)

Likewise:

The “threat” of pornography to today’s unwashed youth (on or off the Internet).

Dunno about you, but I wouldn’ta made it to 13 without pics in smutmags to cue me to what the whole wide world of carnal oo-poo-pa-doo was ABOUT.

The aforementioned Jayne! Mansfield! — hoo wee! — tits out to HERE — first nipples I saw on anyone ‘sides my mother: oh nurture! Just a peek, mind you— mags back then didn’t really show that much — but otherwise there’d’ve been no peek, nothin’.

1956: forty-three years ago. We’re supposed to believe preadolescents need this shit less TODAY? (Pshaw.)

Denying them porn would be abusive.

MODS

Some cheezier modifications v of the record:

Cus D’Amato as a “fine boxing mind” — as opposed to just the formulator of an ultra-safe “Floyd Patterson strategy.” Floyd lacked ferocity (“killer instinct”), grit, guts, nerve, much of a punch, viable footwork, and a chin — a lot to cover for. All he was was fast. So Cus matched him against nonentities — Roy Harris, Pete Rademacher — and even these clowns embarrassed Floyd, knocking him down in early rounds, though through the accumulation of punches he ultimately triumphed — big deal — the most unloved heavyweight champion since Jack Sharkey.

Only because of his short-lived connection to Mike Tyson, whose stock-in-trade, when he was still on, was unleashed ferocity, plus enough power in either hand to take out a mule, things beyond being taught, was Cus, in his lifetime, ever regarded as anything but a marginal schmuck.

The title of an article in *Sport* magazine around ’58 or ’59, before Floyd got KO’ed by Ingemar Johansson, whom Cus regarded lightly (he was European, see) or he wouldn’t’ve allowed the fight, said it all: The Terrible World of Cautious Cus.

And try this on for size:

The Beatles will not fare well in the new century, if only 'cause the full gamut of their once-accessible sonic past no longer exists. 'Cept on warped, scratched vinyl, and when they stop making record needles, that's that. By going beyond normal remastering to REMIX certain "classic" Beatle cuts for CD reissue, Paul McCartney has canceled any ongoing role for them—except as an adjunct, largely mythical, to his own vanity. Devastated in the process is music (yes: music; not recollected youth! not sociology!) an even billion people have got stored in their heads, their hearts, their bones—and can imagine verywell, having memorized every nuance — but will never HEAR, as vibrating columns of air, again. (Unless they're enterprising millionaires who can score lingering undebased analog sources and do what they fucking want, formatwise, with the sonic genepool. Otherwise, from here on out, there is no sonic genepool.)

Which is kinda like taking some print classic like *Huckleberry Finn*, something read and reread for the last 100 years if for no other reason than it's always been there, burning all copies, then issuing it in BRAILLE ONLY, or on the backs of oatmeal boxes (in Greek).

For ex.: "Penny Lane," a full half, along with "Strawberry Fields," of the second greatest two-sided hit of all time (after "Hound Dog"/"Don't Be Cruel"), was originally a very decent treble-heavy song, but in remix Paulie brought his bass way up, and the drums feel different too, and it all sounds between two places (almost like the Drifters' "There Goes My Baby," an early, not totally successful, rock experiment with strings), which it didn't before, it felt indivisible — it's not the same song, not even close. And it's more offensive when we get to a Lennon song, "Baby You're a Rich Man," on which John played this squeaky, spooky, very interesting keyboard thing (a clavioline?) — it was WHAT made the recording so engaging — that's now mixed down, and Paul's bass is up again — it sounds like crap. (Plus John is dead, eh?) These two cuts heard in sequence, on the CD version of *Magical Mystery Tour*, are particularly exasperating, they make gag.

What's this cheesepuff solipsist worth, 8 billion dollars? Why can't he leave this shit alone?

BEATS "R" US

Mea culpa, mea culpa. Yes, I have colluded in denigrating, sullyng, STINKING UP the Beat archive. Can't you smell it?

The redolence of coffee, of Starbucks, and of coffee tables.

There's probably been more unmitigated bullcrap written about the Beats than any quantitatively similar culture scene, including white probes of black music and all the dumb inquiries-cum-exploitations of the hippie '60s. John Updike scolded the Beats as bratty, self-involved children; that academic slime Norman Podhoretz called them leather-jacketed savages with zip-guns: these too-generous, too-virtuous rogue pilgrims whose writings were as perfect an antidote to '50s Drear as rock & roll, as sublimely uplifting, if less instantaneously magical (you had to spend time and read 'em).

And NOW, folks: the coffee table scuzz of *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats* (1999). While not the first c.t. Beat book—Allen Ginsberg did at least three ct.'s on his own (as opposed to just large format, 9x11, like the posthumous Kerouac whatzis, *Some of the Dharma*) — one of the heavier ones with more text than pictures.. I've got the longest thing in it.

An edit-down of a five-year-old article originally called "Another Superficial Piece about 176 Beatnik Books" — they cut me down to 158 — but it's anything but superficial: a stone-serious take on Beat as writ and published...text as direct emanation of self.. the intersection of kicks and cellular concern...the litrachoer of let's-get-naked-for-10-minutes-and-maybe-tell-the-truth — if we fail, at least we tried, y'hear? I talk about all these books and point out how like *On the Road* is really no better than Jack Kerouac's fifth or sixth best novel, after *Big Sur* (one of the two or three ur-masterpieces of the English language), *The Subterraneans*, *The Vanity of Duluo*, *Tristessa*, and possibly *The Dharma Bums*.. so maybe you don't read the wrong one first, just 'cause you're, s'posed to, and get discouraged, and never read Jack again. Nothing on my part to be embarrassed about, I guess, but, but...I dunno.

Shoot, there were some very suspect early Beat collections that included people like NORMAN MAILER, someone about as Beat (or Beat-cognizant) as Tony Curtis. Thank heck he's not in this one, but take a look at the sad parade of interlopers, slummers, and party poop-ers who are: Yoko Ono, Johnny Depp, Lee Ranaldo, Deborah Harry, Graham Nash...Graham Nash? My erstwhile pal Patti Smith, as phony as 80 days are long, whom I remember in 71 calling Ginsberg "that Jew queer," contributes the gushing, almost toesucking "Dear Allen" (p. 274). On p. 307, Don Waller, a slick-haired hepcat wanna-be, the 2nd or 3rd jivest person I've ever met, one of that vast army of jerks who have made the term "cool" useless till the end of time, makes the claim that "Any serious discussion of Beat humor' starts with Lord Buckley and Lenny Bruce" — no it doesn't!

Nor were the Beats themselves especially "hipsters" — sure they were, but they were also distinctly (and distinctively) not-that, and some — Ferlinghetti, John

Clellon Holmes, Carl Solomon — were not-that, period. Kerouac once presented his take on karmic responsibility as “No rest until every sentient being is redeemed” — show me the hipster in them apples, Don.

Listen, I'm no Beatnik— born in '45, you can't be one in much more than spirit (unless you're Anne Waldman, who based on her connection to Ginsberg at Naropa, though she isn't even small-b beat, often gets tapped the youngest “actual” Beat) (Trixie A. Balm, eat yer heart out) — but at least I've got some respect, see, for those that truly be.

Ain't no Buddhist, but I hold this stuff sacred, okay?

And it gives me a creepy feeling to be in a volume so brimming w/ not only coffee grounds but COOTIES.

So why am I in the damn thing? Why have I given it my consent? Hey: I even participated in a reading at Borders to hype sales. I give it my consent for the illusion of visibility, the self-deception of a mission of truth, and last but not least, a mess of pottage.

WHALE OF A POET

Freud.

As dandy a poet as Sappho, Shakespeare, Blake, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Dickinson, Whitman, Pound, Ginsberg, or Ogden Nash.

Now that everything he wrote has been devalued from science to hermeneutics (“interpretation”), while Jung is classed (and revered) as some weird sort of pagan rftystic, and frontline beatniks never lost their affection for Reich, let's just keep Siggy around for what he most IS: an ole-fashioned coke & tobacco motherfucker whose unabashed MAGNILOQUENCE puts him up there with Freddie Blassie and Rabelais.

Poetry: the root, if not route, of ALL philosophy (and science!) worthy of the name.

ED WOOD VS. COCTEAU; WHO WILL WIN?

The notion of Greatness — the judgment, the sentiment, the nervous tic: great albums, great cinematographers, great draft beers — do we really need to waste our

time on that worn and weary road? Is it any longer an attribution of anything pertinent — germane — worth a ding dang dog's dick?

The rise! the fall! (the bloody persistence) of Charisma. As in the charismatic Brad Pitt—a dishrag who “looks like James Dean.”

The April '98 *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, a “special collector's issue,” pays tribute to the Athlete of the Century, Muhammad Ali. There was a time, back when I was more immersed in boxing, when I'd've called him the Man, the Manwoman, the PERSON of the Century. Of course, no doubt, beyond all hype, he is the sportsperson of the 20th, just as he was with 25 years still remaining, and his '74 knockout of Foreman in Zaire stands as one of the two or three most conspicuous public achievements since, well, after my own arbitrary cutoff date, '69–70.

But achievement, merit — what is the cash value (in the William Jamesian sense) of either of THOSE curios at century's end? Possibly they never meant a lot without the requisite hype, without a coercive lesson plan for dumbass mortals, a hierarchic see-Spot-run of canonical More to our abject Less... so good riddance. And in one sense at least, if still below the level of reflexive consciousness, of our common awareness, I think we are rid of one twang of the shuck: “high” art vs. “low.”

And I don't mean 'cause people in gen'ral seem more, more?, maybe more attracted to lowstuff like gothic romance or yuppie sitcoms or whatever, which isn't really even the low I'm getting at (that stuff's just lowest common denom, and what's at issue here is lower than the denom — low as in lowlife: gutter stuff) — I mean that among incrementally more of those who not long ago would've been patrons of high, exclusively, it's no longer as systematically, or as automatically, exclusive (with or without the alibi of “guilty pleasure”). And like I said, not too many of these geeks are actually, wakingly aware if it, but habits of valuation have changed — slightly — there's a certain piecemeal laxing of the rigor — even among those of 'em you can fool all of the time.

DADA come home to roost? Duchamp (et al.) propheteering? Hardly.

Marcel Duchamp, who abandoned “retinal art” not long after painting the arch-retinal *Nude Descending a Staircase*, was one of the supreme foreshadows of the early 20th, even begetting a workable copy— a xerox— a silk screen, anyway — in Andy Warhol, but his wisdom, his shrewdness, his cool-customerhood would have been as zilch without an adventitious mass means of activating some mighty riffs (as infantile as they are intellectual) lurking in everyone's art-critical toolbag, of deconstructing sundry impractical (but ingrained) valuational norms, of delivering

the package on a bedrock of common utility, of normal situational perception, and that means was/is/has been — to the extent that it has been AT ALL — not the beats, not Pop Art, not the hippies, not punk, not specifically anyway, but rock & roll — the Whole Damn Thing — 45 years down its long & winding pike, still rolling (clunkily) on.

The massive means, the massive hap, the massive rub. To even begin to collapse, demolish, reduce (or at least fuzz over) crucial distinctions in the public eye between high and low, we've needed more years of rock than it's actually functioned as rock (as opposed to as Big Culture, or as Typical Showbiz, or as Monster Trucks Soundtrack): the '50s, '60s, 70s, '80s, and '90s... longggg after it ceased being useful for much of anything else...

If you view them with an open heart and an unjaundiced eye, Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*, the celebrated "art pic" of 1950, and Edward D. Wood's *Night of the Ghouls*, "celluloid trash" from '59, offer surprisingly, yet undeniably, similar takes on *Death and the Other Side*, but the bottom line is this: Wood is what Cocteau is trying to be, he's a Cocteau pulling no punches, (put this in his resume!) COCTEAU WITHOUT RESTRAINT. *Testament of Orpheus*, meanwhile, the Frenchman's pretentious '60 sequel, is the stale sweat of a sweaty poet, while the meagerest works of Wood radiate sheer delight.

(Wood: you might know him from Tim Burton's less than flattering *Ed Wood*, '94, which doesn't completely mock the guy's work, heckles it mostly in fun, but stops far short of true admiration. At least, tho, they now got some actual Wood films at the video store, at more video stores. For starters, I recommend *Bride of the Monster*.)

No more Art (sent or received) on a pedestal: wouldn't that be nice!

BOBO

Carl "Bobo" Olson, bom July 11, 1928, Honolulu. "The Hawaiian Swede."

Champion? Also-ran? Both.

Great? Not-great? Not-great.

Overreacher? Underachiever? Overreacher.

Interesting? Interesting enough...

In '53, following the retirement of Sugar Ray Robinson, won 15-round decisions over Paddy Young and Randy Turpin to gain recognition as world middleweight champ.

June '55, moving up in weight, challenges Archie Moore for the lighthheavy-weight title and is knocked out in the 3rd round. In December, Robinson (unretired) KO's Bobo in 2, recapturing the middleweight crown, and in the rematch six months later, in 4.

1960: campaigning as a lighthheavy, with pretensions of moving up to heavyweight, he is kayoed in 6 by an up-and-coming Doug Jones, the first serious challenge (two years later) for the young Cassius Clay.

Career continues through '66. Final record: 92-16t2. In the end: broke.

Rumors of bigamy? Of two entire families in different cities? Um...uh... that's more or less correct.

Did someone say bozo?

STALER BREAD, GRIMMER CIRCUS

- My wife's been sick, the
- young'uns too,
- And I'm durn near down
- with the flu,
- The cow's gone dry and
- them hens won't lay.
- But we're still a-livin', so
- ever'thing's okay.

— *"Everything's Okay," Luke the Drifter (Hank Williams)*

The commoditization of despair.. the "populism" of universal slip-slide.. the nofuture of an illusion...the mega-marketing of leaner pickings.

In 1980, during the Iran hostage crisis (and the CIA's Afghan incursion), *Slash* editor Claude Bessy, a/k/a Kick-boy Face, punk-rock's hottest voice-in-print, announced,

without a trace of grief: “We will not live to see the end of this decade” — he figured Carter would be blowing up the planet any day. “I only regret,” he added, “that I won’t live to see enough of the horror.” Slightly later, after the threat had subsided (but why forget its sting?), *Slash* reviewer Chris D. hailed some German punk LP as “adequate sonic preparation for the heat-death of the world.” Torment, torture, and subjugation as the trip...dig it.

The X Files: of course they lie to us — or is it simply we’ll believe anything? Either way, the endless well-spring of a real kink of a show...both ABOUT the ruse and the ruse ITSELF... *Twilight Zone*, or is it *Gilligan’s Island?*, as *60 Minutes*.. .escapism and surrender at the same time, in the same breath.. .can’t wait for the next episode!

David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ*: the abhorrent yuck of what cybershit hath wrought, and of what we’ve been duped into demanding from it...done as perhaps the most seamlessly, elegantly crafted LSD movie, ever.

KEROUAC NEVER DROVE, SO HE NEVER DROVE ALONE

You’re born alone, you die alone, you pull into a 20th century truckstop alone where every trucker looks like the devil. Like pictures of the devil. Like they’d kill you worse than cops or buy you a beer, two beers, if they knew what you were thinking. About their looking like the devil or killing you or buying you beers. But there’s no beer at this stop, so it’s only devil, killing...

Richard Meltzer is author of the nonfiction books The Aesthetics of Rod, Gulcher, and LA Is the Capital of Kansas. He has written for the LA Weekly, LA Reader, Rolling Stone, Spin, and The Village Voice. His most recent book is his first novel, The Night (Alone). In the spring of 2000, if the world still exists, the massive anthology A Whore Just Like the Rest: The Music Writings of Richard Meltzer is scheduled for publication.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer's Navy, part 2

The continuing adventures of a most unmilitary writer as he boards the USS *Constellation* and discovers a sprawling city at sea

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[July 17, 1986](#)

Cover Stories



Between big healthy spoonfuls of goober 'n' bran. O'Halloran asks if my stay so far has been "rewarding." "Lemme put it this way," I say. "I kind of had this idea when I accepted the assignment that it would be something like sitting in a dentist chair."

A hot, crummy morn ... oh stop complaining. This is SEA DAY, the day I at last go to sea. Having endured training camp, even if just as a tourist, I am ready to drown — well, anything *short* of it — if that's what it takes to get through. I don't mean to sound melodramatic, but as I wheel across the Coronado Bay Bridge I can't help but feel the horror ante increase. On land they were *playing* war or playing something; at sea they'll be making it. Or *playing* making it — which, is still different from just

playing *playing* it. Or whatever. Grownups will be involved this time, which makes it more serious. But like any prideful recruit fresh from graduation, I feel up for whatever they throw at me. I can swim — in a pool — and they'd have to weigh me down to make me sink.



From the bridge you can really see North island, from when: I'll be flown to my carrier, at least not at an angle of approach that makes it seem as foreboding as it does from nearly anywhere across the bay. From my hotel on Broadway, for inst, it's more than just a dark strip breaking the horizon, 80,000-ton muthas floating at its brim; it's this ominous *place*, this masked mainspring of manmade thunder, a different *breed* of thunder than emanates, usually, from Lindbergh Field. Sight, sound, mystique (Home of Mach-2 Fighter Planes ... Home of Anti-Submarine Warfare): remove the ingredient of sight and it's just a hot, crummy drive through Coronado.



A Wing And A Cranial

But an easy one. For my pass at the gate, I'm not even asked for i.d. True, it's marked "V.I.P." — but you'd think they'd wanna certify I *am* the V.I.P. And though Marines with bayonets patrol points of entry, it's almost as an afterthought that one Finally looks at my pass. Easy. Now to make my flight.



It's Saturday, few signs of life, no one to direct me to the place where I'll be "briefed." Is this the right base? Maybe I'll just go home. Finally, by map, sweat, and accident I find terminal ... hangar ... V.I.P. lounge. Four v. importants have already arrived. Private-industry sonsofguns, guests of the Admiral, in togs and luggage like they're bound for Palm Springs. They've got press kits — "WELCOME ABOARD USS CONSTELLATION" — mine will have to wait till we're at sea. Civilians have ranks as well as seamen; I busy myself perusing the list of no's.

NO pets; live ammunition, grenades, or other explosives; inflammables; magnetrons (magnetrons?); radioactive materials; alcoholic beverages; narcotics; flash bulbs. None of which I've got. (Unless by accident I packed a magnetron.)

I'm sure that if I'd packed my flask of Lamb's Navy Rum, an option which definitely crossed my mind, this is where they would catch it. There's a feeling in the room — well, *I'm* feeling — of impending security crunch, one made all the more palpable by the fact that so far. For me it's virtually been security zilch. Except for a quick bag check at one of the training schools, one so slapdash they didn't even check the pouch containing my interviewer's cassette recorder, no one, as far as I can tell, has actually *looked through* anything. Least not while *I* was looking. And that biz this morning about not checking i.d., there's gotta be some backup to that. Somebody could've MURDERED ME last night, gotten my pass, come in my place with a bagload of guns, bombs, and magnetrons. Surely, for the safety of America's Flagship, they'll examine my bag (if not my pocket, socks, and a-hole) to certify me safe as the Admiral's golf pals.

So when "briefing" begins I figure that's it, the prelude. We'll hear classified *this*, no clearance for *that*; they'll swear us to secrecy, read us our rights and then search us. What we get instead is an explanation of equipment. A demo of the shit we'll be wearing. "Cranials," these huge helmeted whatsems with protuberances on three or four separate axes. Large rubber earthings to block out the sound. Lifejackets and how to pull the cords, activate auto-inflation, the dye marker and radio transmitter. Equipped — no search of nothin' — we board a cozy C-2 transport, a cargo plane.

For the worst flight of my life. Before we even taxi, just loading, the thing jostles worse than most storms I've flown in. There's no windows, none I can see from where I'm sitting, though the way we're strapped in you can barely turn your neck. We'll be landing "hard" on the deck of the carrier, hooked to a stop that decelerates us from 120 to zero in three seconds, so they've got us *backwards* to avoid whiplash, strapped triple tight at the shoulders and waist. With the ear-things on there's an

unpleasant sonic isolation; off, it's so jackhammer loud you just snap 'em back on. And these murky-eyed goggles, we're wearing goggles in case of flying particles, cargo, whatever — and the way the thing's flying I'm taking no chances without. The flight is *rocky*, it's gruesome, it's supposed to take 15 minutes, half an hour, and at 45 I am *sick*.

And not puke sick — *bone* sick. Worst-hangover-of-your-life sick. I've read about "white knuckle" flying: I look at mine and they're grey. Or maybe everything's grey. Even if it meant losing my tape recorder, Minnesota North Stars cap, and toothpaste, I would rather (I believe) be floating in sea salt, releasing my dye, than experiencing much more of *this*. Smoke? steam? starts seeping through cracks in the floor and I'm thinking loud, strong, at broadcast volume so maybe they'll hear me, *ditch the fucker! ditch the fucker!* but they don't seem to hear and on its own it stops.

Then — guy waves his arm — the prearranged signal — 30 seconds to thud-down. We miss it and swing 'round to try it again. THUD (is that 120'?), of compression (3 seconds?)... certainly feels like zero at this end. For all the air and sea of it it was kinda like a subway crash minus the sound. No dazzling, dramatic swoop of eagles, or even of cargo planes — just thudding strapped in backwards in the dark.

Okay. Glad to have not lost my toothpaste, I arise, deplane, my inner ear telling me of more rocking, more list, than I'd ever have bargained for. *I'm not ready for this I'm not ready for this I hate it hate it shit piss goddam son-o-bitchin'*, and then ... bliss.

Well not yet, not immediately. But OK.

Half The Size Of Arkadelphia, Arkansas

For the first lots of seconds the greeting crew on deck don't know what to make of this, er, stranger in their midst. The Admiral's cronies they must know on sight, but who's me? Stares, counterstares, awkward silence, then an outstretched "five" lunges through them like a lance headed straight for my gut. The Fastest Glad-Hand in the West, the palm, digits and wrist of Ensign O'Halloran, Constellation PAO — "Call me Mick."

I do and then he jabbers jabbers jabbers, shipboard jargon bouncing off me like dry macaroni. "Ladders" is all I pick up, ship talk for stairs. And "knee-knockers," though I'm not sure I'm hearing it right — these things you bang into in corridors, actually closer to ankle level (Navy humor?), a means, apparently, of gauging distance and

location, as in "Go three knee-knockers, hang a left." The corridors are *narrow*, just enough room for two abreast.

Getting more personal, "You're from L.A. you say? Well hey. I'm up there a lot, I try to get up there as much as I can, whenever I'm on shore that is, see some hockey. I really like hockey, though I don't know if you can really call it hockey, the L.A. Kings." Well fuckaduck — ain't life funny? I show him (1) my Philadelphia Flyers watch and (2) my cargo-crumpled North Stars cap. We talk Kings — "They really are awful, aren't they?" — and his hometown team, the St. Louis Blues. He hockey-rants. I hold up my end, and I'd have to say we essentially "hit it off." He's like this amphetaminized (i.e., supercaffeinated) Dobie Gillis, though really nothing, not even slightly, like Dwayne Hickman.

By the time we ankle-bang it to our first full stop, the TV studio, he's data-fed me a summary of the more salient of his 25 years — Central Missouri State (BA, speech communications), U.S. Marines (washed out of flight school, transferred), loves the Navy (but sea duty wrecks your social life), could imagine "getting into media in the private sector." He'd certainly have fed me more (who needs summaries?) but his *job*, right — he still in fact works for the Navy — is to aid me in doing mine. Which means of course show me the ship.

Not him, though, an underling. E-4 Patrick Shelby of Encino. 22. In a kelly green T-shirt that isn't civilian, it's Navy. Lots of different colors on ship. O'Halloran's in tan, *all* officers far as I can tell're in tan; nobody wearing covers, no salutes. A casual atmosphere (compared to land) in many ways — even if they're mostly superficial. A generally casual surface.

As we take to the halls we pass hustle, bustle, nowhere where there isn't mass movement, or mini-mass, but it's totally efficient movement — like an anthill. I still don't have my sea legs so I lean the wrong way, bump into people, but they rarely bump into each other. We pass fast food, sailors eating burgers, stop at a candy store ("gecdunk") for a Snickers.

Everywhere we go there are TVs, *hundreds* of 'em. Far more, for sure, than you'd find at IBM, General Motors. "We do up to 21 hours of broadcasts daily," says Shelby, the we being him and his department. The needs of a ship this size are such that Public Affairs deals not only with creeps like me, outsiders — we're barely the hors d'oeuvre. The primary focus is on-ship morale, information. There's even a newspaper.

And size, god, we're talking 5000-plus, says Shelby, "sometimes as high as six," 2500 permanently attached. He himself has been attached the last three years. "There's 17 or 18 levels. I'm not sure which, but I've certainly been on them all." We walk several, and each is different, totally different, different *ends* of each arc totally different. Faces, uniforms, jobs, *attitude*. Even heights and weights. Decor I dunno. I don't even notice it, but personnel — it's astonishing. It's like neighborhoods in a city, you're walking and walking and suddenly — how'd you get *here*?

Which is how I feel as we enter the turf of Ordnance, these big, scary beefers in red, black-lettered T-shirts that read BOMB BUILDERS. Imagine that in a punk boutique, but that's what they do, they build bombs. And carry them — backs & shoulders like elephants — to be loaded on planes.

And then this spot, another level, Shelby says, "Notice how clean it is here?" I haven't actually been thinking too much about clean, but so far I guess it hasn't really been as sick-sick antiseptic as the barracks at NTC. This spot, though, this corridor, it's sick-fuck antiseptic. "Marines live here, these are their quarters" — 80 are on board for security. "As you can see, they have a different *standard* of clean ." They'd probably shoot you if you spit.

Anyway: neighborhoods. Like in a city. A small one, perhaps, but still a city. And not a big office, not a factory. For one thing, everyone lives here. It's not just punch in, do eight hours, punch out and go home. Most shifts are twelve on, twelve off, anyway; a higher level of integration into the *nature* of a day. (Half of instead of *part of*.) Maybe it is like a factory, as a city — *Metropolis* as Prophecy fulfilled. Isn't this what life is "supposed to be like" in the, ugh, Soviet Union? Or the Future, you remember that place: subterranean living or Trump Tower (take your pick) — totally self-contained. Nothing contiguous here but the sea; they need TVs to pretend there's an outside world.

In any event, the feeling is strictly URBAN, a far cry from the training-camp farm. A card-carrying urbanite, I feel so at home I could cry.

An Airman And A Photog

According to the press release Shelby finds me, the full name of my new city is *USS Constellation* CV-64. Its ancestor, the three-masted, square-rigged frigate *Constellation*, was the first ship commissioned by U.S. Navy and, in the "undeclared naval war against France" (1798), the first to "engage, defeat and capture" an enemy vessel. The current "*Connie*," as her friends call her, was commissioned on October 27, 1961, three short years before she participated,

meritoriously, in “retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam.” Johnson visited her in '68, Reagan in '81.

At 85,000 tons, 1079 feet by 270, she, it, is the largest conventionally powered warship ever built by man. Conventional = nonnuclear. There are no nukes aboard. Before I left L.A. I thought I should check this, that there'd be no reactors to enhance any cancers I might be working on, and I breathed a sigh when I found out it was fossil-fueled. But standing with Shelby a level or so above flight deck, each of us with a pair of those antisound things on our ears, watching takeoffs and landings of the *Connie's* — and the Navy's — principal “export,” fighter planes, I start wondering whether there might be any of that *other* kind of nuke aboard. I know it's subs that have all the missiles; but maybe an old-fashioned bomb or two is down there with the red T-shirt squad. Realizing such info is no doubt classified, and considering it merely to construct a piece of conceptual sculpture (Nearness to Source of Annihilation), I drop the thought and concentrate on digging the planes.

Which really ain't so hard — it's fun. In a kind of idler-looking-at-nothing sort of way. You wait, they take off, you take note (if you care) of the vectors of departure, follow 'em awhile, they're gone. Occasionally one's being readied, fueled, they'll check and find something wrong, the pilot gets out, they fold up the wings, down the hangar. With landings there's a game you can play. They can — but usually don't — miss on impact, miss the hook, and have to throttle up, off, try it again. So you count the attempts — all flights — when it happens consecutive. While I'm watching it's never more than two. Nothing particularly *exciting* about it, mainly it's just kind of bearable in the way that watching 13-year-olds play touch football can be bearable (but the Super Bowl you need to have a bet on). If I had nothing better to do, I could probably watch it for hours. F-14 Tomcats and F/A-18 Hornets — like the ones that were used in Libya.

“The main purpose of these short deployments,” says Shelby once we're somewhere his words can be heard, “is to qualify pilots, those that need so many landings, so many flight hours, to qualify.” The *Connie* at this moment is less than a week into a scheduled two weeks at sea, never very far from San Diego, anywhere from just under 50 miles out to perhaps as many as 125. On the longer runs, the WESTPACS, in tandem with the rest of the Seventh Fleet, six or more months and a couple of oceans (Pacific, Indian) are consumed, and jets from the *Connie's* air wing will at times take off and land without a minute's break for 48 hours. There've been much bigger gaps than that today. Yet even with less seemingly on the line, there's little doubt that the principal basic thrust of this here run, indeed of all life aboard ship, is to assure, in myriad possible ways, the ongoing potency of the *Connie's* piece of U.S. Naval Aviation pie. The Navy is Naval Aviation — and don't you forget it.

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At hangar level we peruse the merchandise. Jets being serviced or sleeping awhile. "They look like *monsters*, don't they?" says Shelby. "Yeah — or big insects," I say. As we watch repairs I wonder aloud how these guys must feel, being airmen — not seamen — in the reigning taxonomy, and yet having no real shot at ever flying themselves. Pilots are airmen/officers; only officers (i.e., college boys) fly. "It's a joke," says Shelby. "It takes a college education to fly, but only a high school education to keep it operational. Does one seem less technical than the other to *you*?"

Turns out he's still, technically, an airman himself, even though he's fully attached to PAO, serving as the ship's unofficial photographer. To be official, he'd have to have a journalism (JO) rating, calling for a stretch at the Navy's journalism school in Indiana. Such has been dangled but never, he claims, credibly offered. "It's been a snowjob since day one." Fresh from high school, an amateur photog of rock concerts, he'd been accepted by Arizona State but at the last second visited a Navy recruiter. *Sure* he could get into photojournalism (but the airman quota needed to be filled): "I've fixed airplanes, there's a sense of achievement, I can do it as well as it takes. But it's not what I *want* to be doing, either for the Navy or with my life." In the past year, the last of his initial enlistment, he was given *re*-enlistment — well before the fact — as prerequisite for the three-month journalism course. If they didn't trust *him*, he reasoned, why should he trust *them*? In less than a month, his enlistment up, he'll rejoin the civilian populace.

"I've made lots of friends, seen lots of places, but it's time I grew up, started doing something *meaningful* with my life. I hope I get out in time to shoot some rolls of Hands Across America—my release date is in some dispute. Or that peace march, whatever it's called, the one that keeps getting interrupted by rain. And I even have a screenplay up my sleeve — don't laugh—sort of an enlisted man's version of *An Officer and a Gentleman*."

Pacific, Mother Of Fish

I don't laugh; I like the kid. Admire him. At 22 he's got the bulk of his youth still ahead, with mem'ries of Navy to flavor it. He's been totally forthcoming with me, straightforward, the first of the lot (I would guess) who's kept nothing hid. He's shown me a ship, a city, and now he shows me the sea.

"On WESTPAC this would be reserved for officers" — we stand on a strip of ship, port or Starboard, I dun-no, adjacent to the hangar. "I've seen whales from here, dolphins."

"Sharks?"

"At least their dorsals." We're moving, the ship is, at a good clip, into the wind, enough to give the planes an added lift. I stick my face out, nice breeze, but we're too high up to feel the spray. My legs, body are slowly getting accustomed to the rock, the sway. It's a sunny, *sunny* afternoon, but the side we're on is shaded. On the other side the sea is white, here except for highlights, patches, it's transcendently, mindbogglingly BLUE. I remember a Beach Boys album cover where the color of somebody's shirt was actually *identified* — how pretentious, I thought — as "Pacific blue." Well here 'tis! What a fucking blue! You could tell it from the kelp/sludge green of the Atlantic without a second's thought. If they blindfolded you and dropped you in an ocean, you'd have no trouble, once you got back your sight, deciding to check the "A" or the "P." What an ocean: pacific ... "peaceful." It is. I hum the main theme from *Victory at Sea*. I am ... euphoric.

And then we see some beds. Lousy beds. The ones enlisted sleep on. Or in. *In* is probably more accurate than *on*. There's nothing above you but the next mattress up or the ceiling. Very tight, these bunks. "Berths" — Shelby corrects me. He sleeps in one (valued @ \$170 a month by the Navy). There's *miles* of 'em; it's a good thing they don't berth you vertically. I'm thinking: reasons to be bitter. And then I meet Mike Campbell.

From PAO. This vivid scowl on his face, like you see in photos of Marcel Cerdan or Roberto Duran, he storms past his berth, throws track shoes in his locker, gnashes teeth, stands there with this look like you're supposed to know what he's thinking. We don't. Finally, peeved that he's gotta make it verbal: "The bastards wouldn't let me jog!" Is that right?

Campbell, 35, E-6, is the Bitterest Man in the Navy, the bitterest person (other than myself) I have met. A graduate of the U. of Maryland, where he almost played football (injured something) and his father was or is the swimming coach, he joined the Navy at 27 to frontally, forcibly muck his way into a different arena of life. "I was doing this, I was doing that, *you* know." For the Navy what he got to do was one of these dream gigs, the kind / would even do if I was 27, 28 and they offered it to me: sportscasting. Did a daily sports report for Armed Forces Radio in Hollywood, wrote his own copy, lived in an apartment in Van Nuys the land of jogging, got occasional passes to Laker and Dodger games. Did this for the better part of two enlistments.

Then whudda they do, they look at his record. "They discover I've never been to sea. It's the Navy, right, so they stick me on this horrible boat." Six months ago. What bothers him most is not the no jogging, it's the no radio. There's radio, sure, but not for him. He's gotta do it, read sports, on a nightly PAO-originated live TV newscast at 1800 (6 P.M.). "I *hate* looking at the camera, trying to pretend I'm at ease. I'm a serious professional, I try to be a competent journalist — but it's TV and who the hell cares? By the way," he asks Shelby, "did they fix the teleprompter yet?"

"I don't know, let's go check."

"*Goddammit*, they better. I am not gonna read my copy off a piece of typed paper I'm holding in front of me. Do you know how *awful* that would look?"

"Let's go check."

We do and the news isn't good. It seems someone from electronics has been by, tried to improvise, couldn't come up with a part in stock that would work. Had this been a longer deployment, the exact part might've been aboard in abundance, but no luck today. BUT. But reprieve. The ship in the interim has journeyed close enough to shore for its master receiver to pick up land-originated signals, and the network news has been slated in place of PAO's.

"*Canceled?*" — Mr. Bitter responding. "I've written my *copy*, I've picked out goddam *slides* of Leon Spinks" — there's a Leon story, he's bankrupt or something — "and they *cancel* us?! *Goddammit*."

The Guys (I Love 'em)

Well, hey, *I'm* easy to please. Show me some tapes instead. Of a newscast. So I can see what it's like. I'm on this assignment, remember? Oh, sure.

I really dig their *reluctance* to show-and-tell. To serve up hefty exemplars of what *they* do; who cares (I don't right now) what the rest of this city-at-sea does a-working? The men of Connie PAO — I'll introduce them — are, it gushingly dawns on me, my PEERS. I'm not a journalist. Am I a journalist? Maybe I'm a journalist. What's a journalist? Same with all of them. (We all work hard and who, generally, cares?) Without *doubt* this is the most likable assortment of grownups in the same — pardon the pun — boat as myself that I've stumbled upon in 10-15 years. By which I mean it doesn't even matter how "well" they write, photograph, read (or not) from a teleprompter or sheet. I like them as people. I'm a firm believer *in ad hominem*, lemme just see what they've got.

One thing they've got is their newssheet. *Tune and Tides*, a thousand copies daily — read it and pass to a friend. "Carbomb Kills Five, Injures Six in Madrid Residential District" — story "compiled from AP and UPI." Compiled means Jon Knutson, for instance, part-time cartoonist and host of *Flashback Rock Attack* on KCON Radio, reads the wire reports and, quick as a whip, *paraphrases* them at a word processor. Paraphrasing I've always respected.

And the handy, winsome *Connie Television Show Guide*, a biweekly 20-pager. Photos on the cover (Shelby's) of bathing-suited Australian "foxes," from the most recent WESTPAC stop in Perth. As we're sitting drinking coffee, Diet Cokes, *Ghostbusters* blares on the studio monitor, channel 11, and a flip through the *Guide* reveals *Oh God! You Devil* as the competition on ch. 13. Followed by: *Jaws II*, *Benny Hill*. Two channels, 21 hours daily, unless more is coming in from land.

Shelby inserts a cassette of the PAO newscast from the day the shuttle blew up. Chief Waldrop, ostensible head of the department, at least of its ongoing operations in this *room* in lieu of Ensign O'Halloran or this bigger cheese I never get to meet, protests its preemption of *Ghostbusters*, which is just at the good part with all the slime. "Why would he wanna see *that*?" he queries. Hell, Chief, to see you! I see him read news of the shuttle. Low-key, no obnoxious facial histrionics. Razor-cut and neat as a pin, kind of like former Laker announcer Lynn Shackleford, he could pass — 'cept for the dress blues — as anchorman for virtually any city's nonnetwork 10 P.M. news show. It would have to be a western city, though — the accent's a giveaway.

Before joining the Navy in '72, Paul Waldrop, now 33-34, deejayed in New Mexico and Arizona at various 10,000-watt, m.o.r./playlist type stations. Three years into his first hitch he met his wife, also Naval, at the very journalism school which has terminally eluded Shelby. When in port, he and the missus work a block apart; she does training films for Naval Aviation/North Island. His next assignment, not far off, is a public affairs staff position in D.C. with the Chief of Naval Operations. If he ever makes it to press sec for some president, he will hardly be the biggest dip, or drip, who has held the post. A very easy-going boss/manager; I wouldn't mind working for him at a 10,000-watt station in L A.

After Waldrop comes Campbell. He isn't too good. Even with the teleprompter he's a nervous wreck. A commentary on the New England Patriots' alleged coke abuse prior to (and during?) the Super Bowl. Lots of actual humor, drug puns by no means stale, it would probably play — well — as printed copy. But vocally delivered—before a camera — I can readily see what the guy's been complaining about. I turn and face him in the here and now, off tape; he looks ashen.

To cheer him up, I agree to read a few of his boxing pieces, stuff he's had published from time to time in limited-circulation Navy pulps. His scrapbook's right there, I read one about this Navy fighter who keeps retiring and unretiring and can't quite get the hang of it either way. He's just lost his latest comeback bid on a cut, bringing his overall record to something like 27-12. While not the work of an A.J. Liebling or a Dan Parker, the piece exudes as deep a compassion for the plight of the also-ran as boxing prose generally allows itself to do. I tell Campbell this—the compassion part — and his face gladdens. I've also got a hunch — something in the piece — and I ask him, "You ever read any Kerouac?"

"Only 17 of his novels."

"How about *Tristessa*?"

"That's the one I never read."

"What'd you think of *Big Sur*?"

"Oh-h-h, that and *The Subterraneans* are my favorites."

"Dr. Sax wasn't too good."

"No, but I tell you, he's one of the reasons I'm a writer. Not to mention my leading the kind of life that led me *here*." We talk about Dhanna Bums, we talk *Vanity of Duluo* and *On the Road*, somehow we get to talking Thoreau. "He's too radical for me," says Mike.

"That's funny. I think he's too suburban."

"Shit — I haven't had a talk like this in years."

At which point a knock on the door. As I'm closest, I open. The return of Ensign O'Halloran. Big gaudy smile, first words out of his mouth: "Hey! How's your day been?"

"Great" I say, "really great." All magnanimity, I add: "And yours?"

"Oh, hey, wow — if it went any better I couldn't stand it."

The World's Best Pizza

O'H is back to take me to din-din. The wardroom, officers' mess. A far cry from recruit sloptown, NTC. Roundtable seating. Cloth napkins in individual imprint-lettered compartments, so you don't confuse your own with Lieutenant Schmuck's. A bunch of cabbages carved, hacked and tinted to resemble a basket of flowers — compliments of some overachiever at Mess Mgmt. School. Possibly a Philippiner; every mess manager I see is that or black. Realizing this is the first time I've been in a room with only officers, this many of them, I do an ethnic check: all white, nobody black, brown, yellow, or even particularly tan. Every white person near us receives from the ensign a methodically inflected, yet unquestionably sincere, "Hey howzit going?" which when returned in kind leads to auto-variations on "Any better I couldn't stand it" — which I now take to be his *signature*, known in wardrooms far and wide. A heckuva guy.

The main course tonight is pizza, that and/or lasagna and/or Italian sausage. I take all three. Broccoli w/ hard-boiled egg; salad bar; butterscotch pudding; water recycled from the sea. I know pizza, I'm no fool, and this pizza is *good*. The third or fourth best I think — yes—I have eaten. Certainly the best non-storebought I can remember. Good fucking meal!

As we scarf, the ensign and I talk hockey, nothing else seems as e-z a means of conversing in the Void. The Stanley Cup playoffs — "The Blues have a chance, they really do, I think they can beat Calgary, well I dunno"—the days (before his time) before goalies wore masks. Seeing a group of Marines across the room, he grows wistful. "Sometimes I miss the Marines, wish I could've stuck it out, what I miss, they had better *discipline*." This, the discipline biz, is the first totally noncredible thing I've heard him say. I like him much better when he wavers, in fact that's what I like him for. He could advocate anything and its polar opposite — without breaking stride — in less than seven seconds. I can imagine him a lobbyist, a spokesman for YAT (Young Americans for Tofu) or the ANSPF (Association of Newspaper Subscribers, Paid-in-Full). If I had to guess his politics, party affiliation, any of that, I would guess *all*.

I check his plate; so far I've been busy with my own. Smaller portions of basically the same as what I've got, but upon his salad greens sits a mound of cottage cheese, and atop that cheese: peanut butter.

Officers Are Lonely People Too

So hey, here it is SATURDAY NIGHT, time for dunno ... how about a movie? Well not the *big*-screen kind, nor even the *screen*-screen kind — whaddaya think this is, the '70s? — 21-inch cathode will have to do. *Sweet Dreams*, the story of Patsy Kline

starring whatsername, the one Sam Shepard's sleeping with, on the PAO VCR. An Ensign O'Halloran Special, invitation-only, at 2030 — 8:30 PM. But just for options, let's see, on the teevee itself is a choice between *Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Jaws III*, and slightly later Meryl Streep in *Plenty*. "Who wants to look at Meryl," declares a guest, "when you've got Jessica Lange!?" — so *Sweet Dreams* it is. A library copy. For officers, chiefs, and me.

And Mike Campbell, he's still around, still fuming about something or other. Maybe he tried to jog again. He grumbles, snorts, talks through the film unfazed by ranking manjacks praying for his death, one great kiss-my-ass of a mothereffer. A great guy, a great negative presence — him and Lester Bangs would've been some punchout — but even just the officers, straight to the *nth* with no measurable irony: even *their* homey ness really gets to my soul.

Or their away-from-homeyness, their universal *never-at-homeyness*, the at-seahood per se of folks whose lives (by choice) are "in transit," "at sea" — forever (for now) beyond the landmass-contexted blankety blah blah. It's as if — pardon my romanticism — everything plays *because* nothing does ... something the sea just plain *giveth*, y'all. Onscreen, Ed Harris tells Jessica/Patsy his name is Charlie DICK, she cracks up and dang it if they all — we all — don't as well, just like that chain gang in *Sullivan's Travels* getting off on a Goofy cartoon. He then confesses that he's got more in mind than "bumping uglies", and we like *explode*. We settle down, a roly-poly lieutenant from Wyoming (Claude Akins could play him) asks, "What, you never heard that before?" to which a bespectacled Wally Cox from the Personnel Dept, offers, "Yeah — in Wyoming!" Haw, double haw — it's fast, furious, stoopid, and it *plays*.

Lookit, I've been in *many* alien social environments — who hasn't? — where all the hi-jinx just strike you as so *damn corny*, so yucky, that just to endure the whole thing you internally one-up it, mock it silly in your burning, cluttered skull till you end up feeling like an overheated, overwrought elitist prick. It bums you, you bum yourself. It's so easy to fall into that. Or if you're *desperately* lonely you might advantageously lie to yourself, forcibly suspend disbelief, disaffection — or get drunk. Well in this setup I am *not* feeling that depth of lonely, maybe just catching peeks of the shared common-mammal abyss that Celine, Bukowski, Henry Miller wrote about so much, and drinking is of course not an option. I'm sure that if I'd smuggled my rum these guys could dig it — probably — but more than that I'm simply, truly enjoying this crap, having actual gosh-damn fun, feeling a *part of things* in disarmingly direct proportion to their innate hokeyness.

It's the most communal fun I've had before a TV, in fact, since 1970, me and the Blue Oyster Cult watching *Wide World of Sports*, laughing, hooting, throwing objects at the screen — watching professional woodchopping from Wisconsin. True, a number of us were on acid at the time, but, hell, the *shared humanity* (of sitting still, together, for relentless maxi-stupid) was cuttable with a toy knife. Y'know undeniable. And here, April '86, 100 miles of brine from the nearest, I am gripped by a twinge of the same damn whatever-the-hey. "Camaraderie," bathos-as-pathos, nonselfconscious lamebrain-interpersonal kneejerk hoop-de-doo.

I'm feelin' good, in on the rhythm, and when Patsy gets all bloodied in this car smackup and Chief Waldrop says, "I thought she died in a *plane* crash," I shoot right in with "This is only the *dress rehearsal* ." 'S automatic, nothing forced, and of course it ain't funny — but it gets howls, actual howls. Wally Cox yells, "There's a sicko back there!" Which O'Halloran, bless him, clarifies: "Finin' right in!" Charles Manson, Pee Wee Herman, Salvador Dali, King Farouk...who *wouldn't* fit right in? Still I feel like a million, a thousand, at least a hundred bucks.

And I really wish I and all my buddies (c'mon, it wouldn't sink us!) could right now have us a BEER. Even a light. Don't the Brits have a daily grog ration? What's the harm of one Bud Light a night?

THUNK go the landings overhead, THUMP. All this fun, all this levity, it's time I went and did some work. All night there've been planes coming in at the same sort of rate as by day. We're just three levels down and you can't help but hear it, feel it. Like living under a freeway or watching movies at a drive-in near an airport, you get used to it (but it won't go away). Anyhow it's time I earned my keep observing the war machine by night: the rocket's red glare; the courage of commissioned peckers landing their aircraft in the perilous ebony blight. I reach for my jacket, nod at O'H, and he grabs for his. Doin' my job, him doin' his — he can always replay the cassette. We reach the door, some lout says, "Where you guys goin' — to rub uglies?" Wyoming corrects: "*Bump* uglies." What a swell bunch.

Outside it's as good 'n' cold as I reckoned it'd be. My ear-covers, on or off, make the night alternately dark 'n silent, dark 'n roaring. Some stars but I can't find the moon. Maybe behind a radar tower ... no, can't locate it. Nightwind, nice, but we're still too high to encounter spray. We go fore, we go aft. I bang into railings, stumble a few times, O'Halloran grabs me — arm, jacket — don't wanna lose that civilian.

Jets take off, quickly vanish. Others approach, headlights red/yellow/green, closer, larger, wings sway — boom — sparks on impact. Sparks are more visible than by day, a higher percentage of landings seem to be scrapped, the degree of difficulty is

obviously heightened, but, honestly, the whole thing is *not* more dramatic. To this observer (I ain't no pilot), observing. The highlight of the whole thing is these crewmen down there *directing* stuff, more high-contrast against the tarmac than in sunlight, their yellow reflectors finally *reflecting*, dancing this massive choreography not only more functional than your average football halftime show (or the Joffrey Ballet) but more structurally interesting, more "entertaining." But the planes, yeah, I could still watch them for hours, let's say half an hour, though I settle for 15 minutes — my ensign has been freezing enough.

What We Talk About

Where better than at sea to "go with the flow"? Giddy from the night sea air, I make haste for the first available digression, thus never learning, with absolute certainty, how *Sweet Dreams* turns out. Since Hollywood never lies, I trust it is somewhat in line with our knowing — spectacular flaming horrible aero-DEATH — and forsake audiovisual for mere audio. KCON, 100.5 on your FM dial. Next door to TV and a tad more impressive.

The only cable-TV public access studios I've seen have had three cameras, two or more working; the *Constellation's*, last time I looked, seemed to have one. One is fine, but — just for comparison. KCON Radio, on the other hand, seems far better equipped than the best-equipped airwave dive I've worked at, the admittedly underequipped KPFK ("listener sponsored"). But my new host, and latest PAO hellcat, Joe Wikowski, is not easily impressed by glib relativism. "It's really *nothing*," he says, pointing to the turntables, the tape decks, the console, each of them unrusty, undusty, nothing less than functional and functioning, "it can't be worth more than a million or so." Which to me, factoring in a maximum audience of 5-6 thousand, none of whom are either listener-sponsors or consumers of advertisers' products, seems not only *impressive*, it seems almost excessive. But what do I know?

I quickly surmise that Joe is but the latest (and perhaps greatest) of PAO's nonself-edited fast-lips. Kind of like that guy Goose in *Top Gun*, but less a wise-ass for the sake of sociability, more a pure existential malcontent — like Bruce Dern in *Wild Angels*. At 23 or 24, he's hardly old enough, like Mike Campbell, to be genuinely bitter; much of his dismay is the dismay of time-trapped sensitive youth. "The music today" — he shakes his head, motions toward the tape being broadcast — "the Cars, Duran Duran, Cyndi Lauper. All these people care about is their wallet. Personal expression doesn't mean shit." I utter the secret password — the nineteen ... uh ... SIXTIES! — and his eyes light up, they light up the room, and suddenly we're brothers. Hendrix, the Yardbirds, the early days of the good ol' Grateful Dead — the

before-his-timers he *knows* are better and truer than ANYTHING now: I actually saw these people play, and he just wants to hear about it, talk about it. The eagerest student of history I've ever met. By the time we've exhausted bands, concerts, festivals, he's on many cylinders, flying.

"And the Navy," he opines, "what does the Navy care about personal expression? They're so concerned with *image*, see, we were in port once and they wouldn't let me leave until I got a haircut — it was no longer than this." Shorter than mine, it's the length favored by your average stockbroker. "And a *belt*, I had to put on a belt, can you believe it? They just thought it wouldn't *look right* for a member of the organization to look any different from anyone else. But," shifting gears, "there are a lot of misfits in the Navy, in all the services. This protected little setup attracts them. They come in for a new start, a 'new beginning' — and then what? There's guys here, for instance, who'll talk about women but will not talk about *pussy*."

We, actually he, talks a little about pussy, how it, lots of it, helped break up his marriage when he played drums for a rock lounge act in Cleveland. He then speaks of his father, a cabinetmaker, and his stepfather, a cop (or vice versa), and how neither could understand his devotion to music. How' he drummed with an on-ship pickup band at a *Connie* "steel beach" — barbecues and whatnot out on the flight deck — "the greatest I've ever felt in my *life*, man, communicating through music — it was better than pussy, better than getting high."

Uh oh: territory I *refuse* to get into. No Hunter Thompson, no "investigative reporter," I will not ask the cheap question "Whuddabout drugs?" On a tear, he answers it anyway. "I don't *do* that shit, not anymore, it's the one thing I joined the Navy to get away from. The partying was definitely screwing up my life. But there's guys on ships who still like to party, even with the tests. You can see it in their faces sometimes, just back from shore, you know. I *hear* in fact they don't test for acid, it's not one of the things they check your urine for. Say, is there anything I could show you that you haven't seen? They don't really like me taking tours around, but... "

"I don't think I've seen anything all that *digital*. I thought the Navy would be digital and nothing but."

"No digital ? Hasn't anyone shown you Vultures' Row?"

"Uh, whuh..."

"Radar for the planes? Well *I'll* take you ...*let's go*."

He gets someone to man the tape deck, and we run, do not walk, down tunnels, up ladders, dashing past people in the red monochrome of the *Connie* by nightlight. Joe's got his mission and I huff, puff, follow him stride for stride. Pant, pant — I could be asleep by now — and then... sheer dazzlement.

The War Machine, Finally

Dials, consoles, computers, headsets; big spinning reels of multi-inch tape. Light qua light, sound qua sound, picto-images, numerals. Systems, backup systems, backups for the backups (for the backups). Monitors monitoring air speed, fuel consumption, cloud formation, cockpit fart pressure — every quantifiable datum, phantom, feasibility remotely pertinent to every fighter, transport, helicopter, you-name-it in flight. Eleventeen grids with hupteen luminous variants of your age-old "techno-naturalistic" radar-qua-radar cliché: blips, radial symmetry, amoebic geo-mystery. Skaty-eight others with sporty. New Age, "art-directed" visuals, like this great big'un with a cartoon of a racetrack with all the planes lit up counterclockwise in projected sequence of approach. Rather than duplicate (or triplicate) this particular whoozis — i.e., buy identical hardware just so you could view it from multiple stations or adjacent rooms — they've got a stationary *camera* on it, hooked up to deliver an acceptable closed-circuit facsimile to one or more (slightly smaller) mere TVs. Thus saving the Navy the combined GNPs of Italy, Belgium, and Swaziland; in a room so given to overstatement, even the cost-*effectiveness* is truly baroque. Total outlay cannot be less than \$1,000,000,000,000,000,000.

Which is certainly more than Hollywood spends on its high tech, and even just the look of all this makes anything in *Top Gun* (*Star Wars*. *War Games*, 2010) seem like so much diet margarine, diet shit. Plus, natch, obviously this hardware *works*, has more explicit function than to thrill and chill the senses. There's this unit I'm shown, for inst, which can actually computer-land a plane whose pilot is disabled, comatose — or even dead. (Why allow a stiff to cost you your property?) Speaking of which — death — maybe it was the Air Force which snuffed terrorizes & civilians in Tripoli (losing two airmen *and* a U.S. warplane in the process), but it was the Navy, skippered from rooms just like this, which iced Benghazi (losing zip).

Not that the moment, the situation — right here, right now — feels particularly MILITARY. Warlike or martial. *Soldierly*. And even if you factored in simulated *targets*, which since they're not part of the lecture I'm getting I would guess aren't part of *this* night's festivities. I'm further guessing that it wouldn't make much difference. Not in the tenor of human (life-death) hustle-bustle in this most un-military of sanctums. Everything's cool, slickly efficient, and could not conceivably be

otherwise, not as long as technology such as this is its bone, marrow, nervous system, bowels, blood, muscle.

From this end at least — bracketing of course the input of “policy” — even human *failure* (for instance) could in the worst-case of scenarios hardly exceed the proverbial drop in the bucket. And what, pray tell, “is” the bucket? War, even WAR, especially against those quasi-pathetic underlings whom the admiral at graduation had the gall to dub “and others,” is so prefab from the micro-chip *getgo* that all functional now-ness, all human-protoplasmic DRAMA, has been all but obliterated for the hardware-certified victors. Even as a literal chessgame — all “cerebrum,” zero “heart” — war on this level (excepting — perhaps? — the hypothetical Big One) is something already stored in a micro-chip vault, with even heartless mindset-per-se, still a station of *some* human cross, relegated forever to less than the role of a pawn ... participatorially, “existentially,” speaking.

All of which is something YOU know, I know, just from going to movies, reading pulps, watching sitcoms or the news, but to be confronted with IT on its own chessboard — like wow. The union of knowing and seeing can itself be dazzling, and well yeah, I am. Dazzled.

Then, more dazzerific still, I see some active pawns. Very active. The chief who's showing me indicates this plexiglass wall with guys on the other side scribbling numbers backwards. Well not scribbly, they're extremely neat, legible, but these cats are *fast*. And what a skill, imagine the Navy screening for guys who can write fast, neat, and *backwards*. So O9 this side it reads forwards and “you don't have writers obstructing your sight lines. There's more.

The reason they've got *people* doing this is machines're no quicker. Info comes in from the fly-boys, it comes in as human-voiced sound, and to get it on a high-tech display board you'd still need persons to punch it in. So why not just have them write it? They've got stereo headsets to in fact receive two sets at once, two separate infos, each in a different frequency, a different — as it were — key or octave. The Navy did tests, determined that persons can actually do this, quickly and efficiently, with technology (the headsets) as only an *indirect* intermediary. Of course it's all backed up, tapes record everything, it prob'ly goes onto an instant paper printout, but for instant GRAPHIC purposes, for the whole room to see, it's been placed in the literal hands of physical persons. Persons as machines.

Poor Joe Wikowski, meantime, has got his hands full as well. The room is lousy with off-duty pilots — it's a great show, so why not hang out? As the lowest ranking enlisted man in their midst, it is Joe's misfortune to be coffee flunky-designate.

"With sugar!" "Just milk!" "Two, black!" Boorish and imperious, these blowhards are a far cry from the goodhearted lowlifes, the just folks cowboys of *Top Gun*. This year, by recent estimate, 52% of all first-tour Navy pilots whose enlistments are up will jettison the service, most of them to work for major airlines. In 1985 the enlistment bonus of \$36,000 for carrier-based fliers was insufficient to keep 47% from leaving, and the Navy wants to raise it to 48 thou. These guys — they're running Joseph silly — are opportunist trash. A change of clothes and you'd see them for what, in spirit, they already are: golfers with condos, stewardess-fuckers with gold chains and a paunch.

When later an enlisted refers to Vultures' Row as "The Officers' Space," I nod at both his ill-concealed contempt and the *joke*.

Victory at Pee

Sleepytime chez *Connie*: a "stateroom" of my own. That's what they call it (and that's what it is). Two-thirds the size of my kitchen, slightly larger than my john, no portholes like in *Mr. Roberts*, but by *Constellation* standards one airy, roomy chamber de sleep. A pair of bunk beds, no roommate, drawers and a closet, a sink. Stateroom #031442; officers should have it so good. Or so private. Many, I'm told, have their own TVs; all but the seniorest, however, have also got roomies.

I search the joint for remnants — has anyone left state secrets or his socks? — and, finding nothing, opt for sleep. Good mattress, clean linen, nice soothing roll to the boat. If it weren't for the light left on I'd be sleepin' pretty. Didn't bring an alarm, maybe I should buy one of those cheap digitals you can set, but I need to be up by (J700 and all I've got is my nonsettable nondigital by the bed. Which doesn't glow, so I'll need the light. So I can be up, dressed, and ready for chow with either — whichever shows up first — Shelby or Ensign O'Halloran. I told them both 7:00 but am hoping for Shelby. Don't wanna hurt O'H's feelings, but I would like to sample an enlisted meal at sea.

The hours go fast: I sleep, wake, dream. Dreams of soggy toast (eight slices) and a cup of raspberry glop. In addition to the lulling roll there's this not-unpleasant nautical creaking and some sort of patter in the walls that since it can't be mice I take for rainfall. Twice I need a piss and use-the sink. It drains real slow, doesn't all go down, but why get dressed just to use the communal "head" down the hall? My sole anarchic act as a guest of the Navy (aside from mental blasphemy). Hopefully some poor underling will clean up before the next civilian uses it to soak his dentures or scrotum.

At 10 to 7 by my watch, dressed, groomed, unshaven (I forgot to pack a razor), I unlock my stateroom and behold a new day, fully lit, fully back in semblance of stride. Sailors this way and that. "Sweepers!" — on the PA — "man your brooms, give us a good, clean ship." I'm reminded, not un-nostalgically, of a summer job, high school years, cleaning up garbage on Rockaway Beach. No broom, no PA, but a pick and basket, a uniform. Same hours, even earlier (proof I could once have done same).

At 7:25, neither chap having shown, I explore thoroughly between mattress and wall, both berths, and around the outer edges between mattress and springs. Perhaps a reporter from *Life* or *Argosy*, back in the days of 'Nam, left behind a smutty magazoon, a not-yet-yellowed Ian Fleming. At 7:30 I abandon my search for journalistic Roots, decide that in ten minutes, maybe less, I will chuck the waiting and chug on over to TV Town. In the interim, why not. I'll examine the paint on the wall. Beige, it appears, has recently, or maybe not so recently, been spray-painted over what's this, grey? pastel blue?... and at 7:35, knock knock, a *cheery* knock so I know who it is: O'Halloran. Who, I will soon discover, puts peanut butter in his cereal.

Some kind of bran flakes. I skip cereal. The only cold item I have besides juice is pineapple rings, canned. Everything else is off this master list you check — type of eggs, type of meat, type of spuds — and a WAITER takes the order and SERVES YOU. A black guy. I check over/light, hash, home fries, pancakes. Ketchup and hot sauce already at your seat. I can't imagine officers feeling cheated by an A.M. grubdown like this; breakfast on a par with the finest I've gobbled. *The* best corned beef hash. World-class potatoes. Moderately ungreasy eggs. Pancakes stiff, machine-grilled, but gee. What more could you want — service in bed? If enlisteds ate like this, even twice a week, they would I dunno, work harder, complain less, kiss superior ass ... so it's just as well they don't. (Unless they do — where the heck was Shelby? — and I'll simply never know.)

An Officer And A Dentist

Between big healthy spoonfuls of goober 'n' bran. O'Halloran asks if my stay so far has been "rewarding." "Lemme put it this way," I say. "I kind of had this idea when I accepted the assignment that it would be something like sitting in a dentist chair, that it would be at least mildly disagreeable and I wouldn't be able to leave. As it turns out. I'm having so much *fun* — let's go on record — "that I really regret having to leave so soon."

Wow, hey. A civilian who can dig it. A job well done — how many more months before he's Lieutenant/Junior Grade? — though little can he know how little, or how

much, he's personally had to do with it. Before he can verbalize any, or none, of this, however, a REAL DENTIST arrives — I'm not making this up. "Head Tooth" Dave Koffler sits down to join us, and O'H autoshifts, powerdrives a hale, hearty *heyhowzitgoing*.

Ah! the fortuity of it all. Up to this point I have got on with officers. I've occasionally *enjoyed* officers. I've even I guess learned from officers; but no, in all truth I have not fully, openly conversed with one. Jawed with no self-edit. Shot the actual shit. Well me and Koffler — you'd have to call us soul-rappin' confreres. Right off the bat it's like we've got this thing in common and that thing and ... we even used to take the same drugs. Some of 'em. Back when I partied myself (in a previous lifetime. Don't know about *illegal* drugs, I mean in any of *his* previous lifetimes. That stuff — hey — we're gents and who needs to talk it? But legal and store bought, we're talking and he says, right out of nowhere, "I bet you took morning glory seeds." I smile, sure. And nutmeg." Ditto.

"Nutmeg?" says O'H. who'd've been five or six when we were downing tins of it. "Yeah," say us in unison, it's a real seagoing drug," says me. "Pirates used to take it."

This is after it's been determined that we re both 40, both went to college in the Greater New York area (him. Columbia: me. Stony Brook out on Long Island), graduated a year apart (me, 66; him. 67. He played football, varsity defensive back, in the days (I spit in) "when Columbia was 1-and-9, 0-and-10 every year." Right, and he knew Mark Rudd, they were in some classes and after graduation he dodged for a while" before getting down to the business of avoiding (specifically) the Army. Vietnam era. Naval OCS — "The competition was *fierce*." If you didn't pan out as an *officer* they'd just "recycle you back to 1-A. and you'd end up dead in the infantry." "I was 4-F," I state sheepishly; he shoots me a grin with *affection*.

"You do any graduate work?" he asks.

"Yeah, ha, philosophy, for about ten minutes at Yale."

Philosophy, how does it go — 'Hume won't and Immanuel *Kant*'? How'd you like New Haven?"

"It was so dull the only action w'as every Tuesday and Thursday when the new comics came out."

"Comics! I had membership card number 37 in the Merry Marvel Marching Society! Last time I was home I looked for it, I couldn't find it. God. the comics were great

back then." "Yeah, like those early issues of *Thor*, *Daredevil*... say, are you *literally* Head Tooth on this boat?"

"Oh, yeah. I've got a terrific staff and everything"

And so on. Before we're through we talk wisdom teeth Columbia 60s politics, Columbia footballer Jack Kerouac, Stony Brook the freak school," his son who wants to attend Princeton ("And live in New Jersey?" "That's *exactly* what I tell him") Dave Koffler of Ohio — I forget to catch his rank — as fine a total stranger as I ever hope to meet. (Whom for fucksure I will not see again.)

Goodbye, Sob, Goodbye

Shelby's got an alibi, a fine one, for how come he failed to wake me up. "I didn't sleep very well," he explains, "thinking of Heather Locklear" (But was it about her *pussy* I wonder.)

All I ask to be shown this morning is the boiler room. Show me some steam. Shelby's been down there — but not often. Nobody's ever specifically requested it. Down, down down, down — all the way down. Or so I think. But we've only reached the *auxiliary* boiler room, no steam, lots of air-conditioning jets, loud but fairly temperate. You wanna go further, see the *main* boiler room?" he asks. Naw. this is plenty. We trudge back up, a real workout, one eighth tin height of the World Trade Center. "Is there anything else?"

In my general giddiness I neglect an attraction. I will later sorely rue having missed: the fantail. Don't know if it's even a place, a *single* place, lots of places or just a state of garbage possibility. All morning long, the PA seems to be announcing either "The fantail is open" or "The fantail is closed" meaning — this much I know—you're free (or not) to dump—a the rubbish. Over the side. Fifty miles out—I think — is the cutoff. Beyond you're allowed; within, not. Does it biodegrade by the nautical numbers?

Nor do I attend the Sunday-morning religious service of my own or anyone's choice. For a moment I think *maybe*, but I'm not that big a masochist — I've seen enough institutional godhead at the USO and recruit graduation.

Basically, I just wanna stay good and giddy. By sitting with the guys until I go. In front of a TV. Watching basketball.

Or trying to. As we keep straddling the fantail limit, we also move in and out of CBS's broadcast range, catching only snippets, here and there, of the Celtics and Atlanta, second round, NBA playoffs. At a moment of optimum clarity, Larry Bird sinks a snazzy three-pointer, prompting Waldrop to chirp, "Why don't they just put him in the Hall of Fame?" "He's gotta *retire* first, Chief," killjoys Shelby. "They should *waive* that rule," replies the Chief. When reception fades, stays faded, Campbell remonstrates: "Come on. Skipper, it's Sunday. Steer us to *basketball*. He then hurls a wad of paper toward the trashcan. Wide of its mark, it takes Waldrop's slap to redirect it in. "Two points," sighs Campbell, "and give me an *assist*."

A great sportsviewing team: I will surely miss them. Ships crossing in the night on, of all places, a *ship*. If I ever, by chance, see any of them again, it will not be here. As my time of departure draws nigh, twin duties nag at my gut. The duty, first, to my "story," my writerly calling, as if either or both really needed the topical boost: "What about Libya?" — the first and only time I will ask the question at sea. "Khadafy had it coming" ... "What else could we do?" ... "It proves our technology *works*" ... fine, who cares, at this stage certainly not me. But more importantly, my duty to them. I feel they need to know, since they work (but do not dine) with him, of Mick O'Halloran's peanut butter dementia. I so inform them. Duties dispatched, I board a copter — adieu.

It's the same deal with cranials, etc. as on the cargo plane, but fortunately this time there's also windows too: I need, greatly, to see the *Constellation* — just this once — as a whole. Airborne, from a sharp angle, we all peer down as one. Two of the Admiral's cronies snap photos. What they see and I see certainly looks like a photo: a ship (qua ship) looking like a ship (and nothing more). I straighten in my seat and forget about peering. Goodbye, *Connie* ... goodbye, little city ... sob sob.

A quick flight, a smooth flight, we land. An Admiral's crony asks, "How'd you like it?" All I can think to say is "It was a gas." In the bathroom, at the mirror, I smile broadly and hum "Victory at Sea," stopping only when a different crony enters to shit. I didn't shit at sea either; I wonder why that is. As I drive back to town, the heat, the murk, the *land* put a definite crimp in the leavings of my elation. I will never *forget* the *Connie*, the sea, but I sense that the romance has ended. 'S over and done.

Parking, however, I stand on asphalt and realize with pleasure that my body, in its own sweet way, is still rocking and reeling to the rhythms of the deep. Every breath, in or out, alters the extension of my belly and chest, in turn throwing off my weight distribution and balance, making me compensate by literally swaying, all the way

down to my toes. Delighted, but land-skeptical of small favors, I wonder how long this will last.

In front of my hotel — sure enough—sits a vehicle with U.S. Government plates. Hirelings from the Pentagon, no doubt, upstairs riffling through my training camp notes, pouring shots in hotel glasses of my Lamb's Navy Rum. I'll just wait till they return.

Two crewcuts in civilian threads emerge, pause, drive off. My heart pounding like a typewriter, I reach my room, find nothing's been disturbed. My notes haven't been touched, my tapes, my rum. What a world. Even in Reagan's Germany, er. Hitler's America, er — you know what I mean—I guess there're still these accidents of freedom. Of liberty and perhaps justice for etc.

So I've lived to tell it, and I'll live to write it, and here we are. *Who could play Shelby?* I for some reason wonder. *Who could play Koffler?* Of course — why not? — they can play themselves.

Gazing from my window. I can't really imagine it could've rained. Not here, not (I strain to recall) on the deck of the *Connie*. So maybe it *was* mice after all.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer travels from Providence to L.A. and tells us all about it

Jack Kerouac's biggest problem was he didn't drive

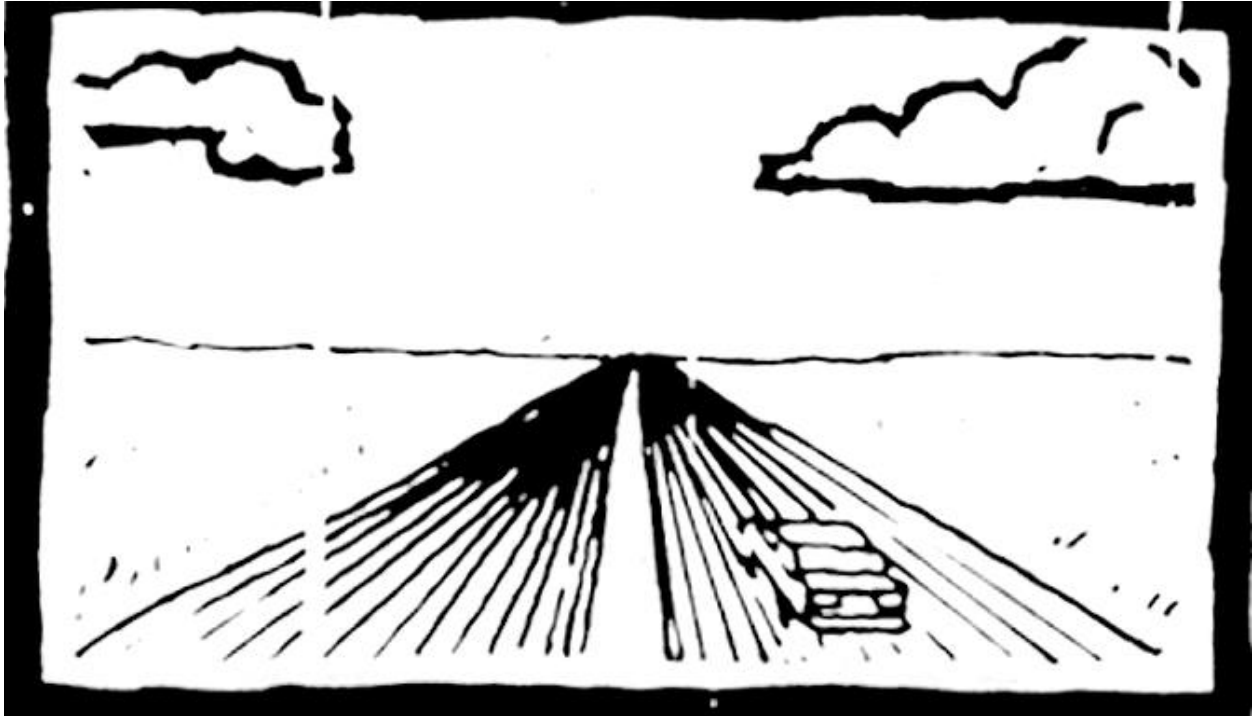
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Cover Stories



I'd never before approached California, Southern or otherwise, from this direction — a preferred route for Dust Bowlers and, one assumes, the author of "Route 66."

- I was alone,
- I took a ride,
- I didn't know
- what I would find there.
- — *Paul McCartney*

Searching for nothing, I found it royally.

Kansas: nothing. New Mexico: nothing. America: nothing.

(But ah! the varieties of nothing in our Land!)

I got this car, see, and drove it from Providence to L.A. Which is not quite the same as getting one at the top of Maine, say, the Canadian border, and tooling all the way to San Diego, Tijuana. And which, as an accomplishment, may not seem like dick but I did it, or came close enough. For the first time in my life, and I'm no youngster. I've "driven the country" — did it solo in fact. By design.

You're born alone, you die alone, you write alone, and on each hump of the journey I tried my darndest to be alone, massively alone, to be one isolated schmuck aswim, adrift, adrive in the heartlands, hinterlands of a huge neutral mess of GEOGRAPHY, a far cry (I hoped) from the endlessly stacked deck of my own neurotic terrain. I wanted, and got, a hefty, heady dose of highway as isolation tank; a hard drive as welcome respite, rest. And since, as a bonus, most stations of the mess turned out to be anything but neutral, I got to be alone, without distraction, with and within IT. This big, stupid country spoke and occasionally was audible. I wouldn't have heard half as much with company on board.

But no, it wasn't my object, certainly not at first, to "see the U.S.A." Nor was I aiming to "do a Kerouac," pull some functional update of *On the Road*, or a '60s-revisited "goof on America." Basically, these wheels just fell in my lap. I live in L.A., my girlperson's in L.A., and up in Rhode Island her father died, leaving behind a '79 Malibu with — due to his Parkinson's — less than 18,000 miles. Which she wanted, natch, but couldn't take the time out to get — employment is like that. Fearing her brother would claim it if she didn't — property is theft — she dispatched me with gas bucks to fetch it. Since I had nothing better to do (I'm a writer, right?), and since it was her car, not mine, and I could thus do what I wanted with the damn thing, I geared myself up for the challenge.

Challenge? Right, I'd never driven more than 400 miles, in one swoop, before.

- Babbling Brook U.S.A. benign little fucker
- babble
- bubble
- the Primal Disorder
- mother to Man
- or at least distant cousin
- nothing to do with TV!
- nevertheless:
- not
- very
- interesting

First hop (don't laugh) took me HOME to Woodstock. Home in the sense that my sister lives there, home merely being where a nearest amenable relative maintains an address. L.A. is hardly my home, it's my office; ditto for the Apple, the office of

my first 30 years. My parents, those fabulous original home-definers, now live in Florida, too far, fortunately, off my likeliest route. One home on a trip like this is more than plenty.

As homes go, well, there are really only three types of middle-class homes, households, in America: squares, hipsters, and yuppies. My sis and her hubbie are squaresville incarnate; benign squares but what can ya do? "Lenny, it's time to prune the azaleas" (but they don't vote for Reagan) — that sort of biz. My niece, meantime, the most nouveau-materialist li'l piece o' cake you would ever let sit on your nuts, has got yuppie stamped on her 10-year-old designer-jeaned butt. "Let's take a ride," I would gallantly offer. "But Uncle Richard" — the little shit — "that's so borrrring." Then she'd think a minute, her eyes'd light up: "Oh, we can go shopping." From squaresville to yuppie; at least they're not wasting hipster genes.

Not that Woodstock itself seems particularly stacked with 'em. I don't know, was Woodstock the town ever hip? Other than for its five minutes, maybe six, in the Folk Revival sun? 'Cause if so, if such items as Time and Tide have ever really been quantifiable aspects of things Woodstock, then the civic hipster blood-count is at sorry, woeful ebb. I mean come on (fr example), the Not Fade Away Dye Company, not too many storefronts from Vidakafka (the life of Kafka?), home of frilly grandma dresses, none containing vermin of any sort. What a place ...

But there's Nature, there's always Nature: I found myself a brook and pulled up a chair. Figuratively, of course — it was really a rock — but I actually sat there staring for three days running. And not just staring: grooving. Appreciating. Water and rocks and moss and bubbles and weeds. No rusty beer cans.

But by the third day nothing had happened. There was just no ... scale to it. Neither loud nor silent. Neither crazy frantic nor exceptionally still. Just sort of a midrange nature prop, a fish tank without the tank (and without the fish). Maybe I picked a bad brook. Maybe I'm no Buddhist. Maybe the only reason I was still there was it seemed preferable to hearing my niece complain that she had no checking account.

Ten-eleven years ago, when I threw in the towel on New York, urban blight wouldn't have made my top five reasons for splitting, had someone pointed a gun at me and said, Okay, list 'em. My motives were essentially "personal" (boy-girl, friend-friend, writer-editor), but framing it all was the fact that I'd just plain used the place up. I loathed rock clubs, hadn't been to a museum in 13 years, read no books so who needs bookstores, movies were suddenly FIVE DOLLARS so fuggit. Blight, in fact

(a/k/a “sleaze”), was probably the last genre of citystuff I actually cared for. So when finally the day came when I’d used that up, and I found myself on a Circle Line cruise around Manhattan (literally: the last cultural straw), I got me a one-way ticket to Somewhere Else — which I proceeded to use up in 30 seconds.

Thirty seconds and a decade-plus onward, having still lived in only TWO PLACES, really, neither proving ultimately satisfactory, in all my born days, I motored south from Woodstock with mild trepidation, returning as I was to the place of my birth, my growth, my shitjoy, piss and oowee, with transit goals and stratagems I had never before employed. Since splitting for the palm trees I’d of course been back — I’d visited, revisited those few remaining Gotham pals ‘n’ buds; I’d hugged, kissed, sat around, had drinks, laughs, departed. I would fly to New York, return to L.A. This time, however, New York was neither principal target nor launchpoint for immediate return. It was but a stop, an ad hoc coordinate, a Mars en route to Jupiter (or a toilet en route to the bar). Having stripmined, from both ends, the whole frigging New York-L.A. axis — Substance versus Illusion as a great American “theme” — I wished for nothing more substantial than a free place to park.

In Manhattan, ha, the Village.

Which I knew would not be easy.

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Which could easily break my spirit.

Which I dreaded more than anything else on the trip.

But fuck me, I did it, found something in only 45 minutes, an hour, a mere 12 or 13 blocks from where I needed to be. I even nicked a city tow-truck in the process, the driver too busy hooking up an illegally parked sucker to even notice. A good omen: getting that compulsory first accident over with toot sweet. The remaining 3000 miles would by contrast be pretty much nothin’.

But the town. Between check-ins with cronies I still had to endure a town. Few of the goods and services of which, at current cost, appealed to me in the slightest. Live jazz, which I’d all but ignored while still a resident, was all I felt any inclination to consume, largely because back in the peehole where I now hung my hat the beast was functionally nonexistent. I slapped down 15 bucks, then another 10 for two drinks (the minimum) plus tip, to catch David Murray and what appeared to be his

B-unit eleventet on a Wednesday night at some frou-frou dive with a giant stuffed alligator over the stage, yuppies of many races in florid attendance. Then I stopped consuming.

Since last I'd looked, the Apple's rich had indeed gotten richer, and its poor poorer. Where the chronically homeless — what we used to call "bums" — once confined themselves to certain neighborhoods, certain stoops, stairwells, and alleyways, they were now everywhere. Every 25 feet. And the despair, shee, the kill-you-motherfucker on everyone's face... I'd never seen so many needles, for inst, in the gutter.

Years without break in a fake, scattered city like L.A. can throw you out of sync with crowds, scum, pus, the Sins of the Pavement. My capacity for blight as foreground thus diminished, I sat with my goodfriend Nick on a pair of folding chairs, taking it in as backdrop, as universal context, as surgeon general's warning somewhere in an eyeful of anything. Maid walks prize-winning poodle past wino ... young mom wheels babe around sleeping junkie ...

The LIES New York tells itself have clearly reached the stage, the scale, of the kind L.A. has always told itself.

"How'd you get through all that Statue of Liberty horseshit?" I asked my companion. "That must've been as bad as our goddam Olympics."

"It was quicker. Yours was two weeks, ours was like two-three days. What I did was I stayed inside, didn't buy the paper or watch the news, and I stuck with stations less likely to go to that button. As long as there's a *Honeymooners* or two and *The Giant Gila Monster* — I think it was on that weekend — you don't really have to pay attention to all that other shit."

The rest of the trip, five or six days, I just drove, stopping only for gas, food, urine, or sleep. Shits I took in the morning on waking.

Smog of New Jersey: I remember YOU. The sight, the smell, the life-is-poison presence; last familiar face 'til Oklahoma City.

Pennsylvania in autumn is a beaut. Yellows, oranges, reds, with splotches of green (no brown) that work like a congruous off-yellow. "The Fall!" hawk the billboards, "You've got a friend in Pennsylvania": nature as Product (& don't you forget it). I'd

spot these signs, "Remove sunglasses," and figure hmm, a real breather coming up — they want you to catch it with no tint, no extraneous shading.

But no, 's only a tunnel carved through a mountain. By the third such passage I caught on, removed 'em.

After West Virginia, which for the minute or so it lasted seemed ostensibly mountainous, terrain as the road served it up got flat (Ohio), flatter (Indiana). The degree of full-spectrum fallhood dropped radically, as did the height and distribution of roadside shrubs. By Indianapolis, what few trees they had were totally brown or totally green; at Illinois, these in turn faded to gray. Dry, grim and relatively unpeopled, the Land o' Lincoln at 1-70 latitude seemed right out of *North by Northwest* — the cropdusting scene — minus (fr contrast) the hills. Yuk, yawn — where's the purple mountain MAJESTY? At which point the Land of Truman, lush, rolling, and cited Missouri, came along at St. Louis to cut the routine.

Dead animals of course helped. For decor picker-uppers you can't beat all the weasels, woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, dogs, possums, skunks, snakes, hawks, deer, and miscellaneous splattered on the blacktop and shoulders — more critters in a day than you'd see at the zoo (or a lifetime of hunting).

Plus you had your higher-mammal fortuities, those local bits, slices of what some think-tanker of yore awoke from a fever dream to dub "Americana":

— beat-to-shit 100-year-old barn w/ satellite dish (Cloverdale, Indiana);

— billboard, south of Pittsburgh: "The door to alcoholism" (football player, red jersey, #12, beer in hand);

— Caddy w/ BISHOP plates. New Rome, Ohio (gal at his side saying nosir, not the bishop of Rome!);

— Howard Hughes Motel, Greenfield, Illinois (He stopped here, see, on the way to Vandalia...).

Mainly, tho, adverts and exit signs. No need leaving the highway to actually see, inspect, eyeball St. Mary-of-the-Woods College (W. Terre Haute), 24-Hr. Adult Books — Truckers Welcome (Yukon, PA), or the fair town of Teutopolis (Germanyopolis?), Illinois. It's NICE (or something) just to know they're there.

And mainliest of all: radio. With both AM and FM, I had it all. I'd be driving through some typical Squodunk, East Jesus, what have you, and signals would come in off these little rinky-dink transmitters. I don't wanna overstate this, but it was really kind of a joy to pick up earfuls of local crime b.s. ("14-year-old held in theft of waffle iron"), farm commodities crap ("Listeners often ask, 'What is a pork belly?' "), high school football, weather reports, local do-good baloney (an all-you-can-eat breakfast of "sausage, ham, bacon, and eggs," proceeds going to "the mentally retarded of Korea"), a "reverse trivia" show on which a caller stumped the panel with "Who wrote Philosophy in the Bedroom?" (Answer: De Sade.)

By joy I mean zoom, zoom — the beautiftil, ludicrous, precious, ineradicable AUTONOMY of these insulated fairytale locales would just immensely tickle me as I zoomed past their literal necks o' the woods. Wouldn't wanna live there, would hardly wanna visit, but receiving their alien transmissions — in coherent English no less — was more of a kick than Carl Sagan is likely to ever get from his storybook aliens. And it always felt TRAGIC — on the hour, the half hour when master-program central piped in current Big Lies (the "national news") to eradicate everything.

When fatter signals were available, I generally aimed my snout forwards, sussing out stations in the next big town, not the last. Through the first couple days I began out of sync and remained out of sync with the hotcha of wherever I was headed, missing some stolen dynamite hi-jinks in Columbus by 12 hours, a bank robbery in Indianapolis by one, and Chuck Berry's birthday bash in St. Louis by 24. If I'd back-listened as well, I'd no doubt've found more to feel out of sync with, but for MASSIVE out-of-sync there was always music.

The music...

And I'm not talking country, e-z listen, senior-cit nostalgia, sicko Christian; I'm talking roots, my roots, rockrockrocknroll. The current stuff? Well, c'mon, I don't listen to current stuff; I've got no clue whether it was good current stuff (so-called) or bad current stuff — by current stuff standards — these stations were playing. Or even if it was current stuff. Huey Lewis I recognized — some things you pick up by osmosis — otherwise, dunno. All I know is every rock station — every state — played the same, same shit. No regional initiative, no individual oompah; just playlist playlist playlist up the gitgo. THE SAME PLAYLIST. Everywhere.

Uniform news ... uniform currentstuff. Not that this particularly bothered me — I could always tune out for pork bellies — nor was the fact of it news. Nor, for that matter, would I have felt less out of synch with station after station of non-mainstream currentstuff. Currentstuff I don't care about — I've already said that. No,

it was the not-so-varied non-currentstuff the jocks played that irked me, newseed me, underlined my alienation from not only Youngperson Music To-Day but that of the great American RECENT PAST. Every oldies station — oldies program — oldies hour — played not only sameshit, not only sameshit I sonically loathed, but loathsome sameshit I did not even (9 out of 10 plays) RECOGNIZE.

Like, okay, I'd hear this thing by Irene Cara, not the theme from *Fame*, and think: (1) SHE qualifies as an oldie??? (2) she in fact DID something besides "Fame"??? Or they'd keep playing some pathetic remake of "Earth Angel," not the Penguins version, an awful remake that sounded like Karen Carpenter. But it's not Karen, on the third listen (third station) I learn it's the New Edition, and I realize I've lost my knack for even gauging TIME FRAME. You either know something or you don't, and knowing the antecedents (or the system of deconstruction/reconstruction) still won't give you a handle on remotely guessing WHEN.

It got to feeling so strange, lost as I was in a time that was no longer time, that an utter pieca shit like "Don't Go Breaking My Heart" by Elton John & Kiki Dee would come on, comfort me, give me a surge of relationship — simply 'cause I could i.d. it — to official history as dealt. Not only do the U.S. and I no longer share a cultural present, we apparently can't even feign a common past anymore — a common marketplace past, even. I mean Christ-o-mighty, I did once hear "Under My Thumb," "Light My Fire," and "Rain" (Beatles) on the AM, let alone FM, airwaves. Why do these bastards choose to forget, to distort, to aid, employ, and abet hirelings who puke on the sacred, the eternal (et cetera)? The eternal is eternal, and I can't for the life of me CONCEIVE of the represso-shithammer these ghouls have brought in to beat "Eight Miles High" out of their psychic reserve (in favor of Irene Cara).

But ya gotta eat, you still gotta eat so I et. And wherever I et — wherever I looked to eat — the food was exclusively chain, fast, corporate. Wendy's, Denny's, McDonald's, you name it. (Truckstops had Hardee's, Burger King.) Didn't matter where I pulled off the roadway, small towns, big towns, within finite minutes nothing was offered but chainfood. What wasn't chain (w/ one exception) was dogfood. Got off at Little Point, Indiana — try and get smaller than that — and oh boy, the Hen House. Hen House Restaurant. Great, swell, order Beef Stew, get a bowl containing much spud, let's say 19 chunks tater to 2 chunks of beef. On back of the check: "Love one another."

Exception: Thurston's, next door to Motel 6, Columbia, Missouri. For \$6.99: all-you-can-eat ribs, brisket, chicken, frog legs, salad bar, beverage, dessert. The second or third best meal I have ever ate.

Okay, national news & music, national (w/ one exception) food. But how 'bout a national nation? — one not requiring TV. To see if there WAS one — heck, I'd come this far — I opted to stay on the interstate.

Only by continuing at double nickels-plus could I get an adequate sense of overlap, continuity, discontinuity, whatever. Only by hitting my quota of states per day could I take the whole thing in as a single anything. (A single multiplicity; a single horizontal blur.) By mid-Missouri, even the idea of New Jersey was receding fast. Only by getting THROUGH it could I possibly get TO it. So hop to it, Meltzer, max transit! (Drink fewer Cokes and you'll need fewer stops for a wee.)

geez

these amber waves of I dunno, alfalfa maybe wheat waving wheat are driving me —

I don't know is amber brown? or is this umber? umber waves of

listen

I know not what grain this is

but the sheer unrelieved

amberness/

umberness

is driving me, well,

I have no thesaurus so let's just say bats

and the only animals

winged or unwinged

living but especially

DEAD

along the

road in Kansas

are

BUTTERFLIES

I should've guessed something was UP when "MacArthur Park" began in Kansas City, Missouri, and ended in Kansas City, Kansas. "Someone left the cake out in the rain" — it was too sunny for words — but would I be up for it?

Kansas is flat as a cake. Flatter. Even with ripples in the wheat, it's as flat as a '61 Gus Grissom flattop. I think the word is horizontal. It's also the first state I hit where they groom the grass adjacent to the roadway, in other words flatten it. Flat must be synonymous with neat, jake, as-suggested-by-God, cute-as-a-cuddlebunny.

Vladimir Nabokov, bug collector, would've loved Kansas and, worldly s.o.b. that he was, probably did. Butterflies attack you as you drive — at least they did me. Monarchs, sulphurs, fritillaries, swallowtails: a reg'lar Lepidoptricon. You see them flutter a ways off, the only real color in the landscape, and 'fore you know it they're the color and glop on your windshield. It's no great leap of mindset to imagine The Wizard of Oz as having been conceived, gestated, and written here ... L. Frank Baum meets the author of

Lolita (15 rounds; who will win???)

Maximum flat after harvesting — some acres had been reaped — is no more, no less, than Basic Flat minus the ripple, minus some inches and feet. You can't out-max max. You can't see to a FURTHER forever in all directions. Simulated "infinity" is the upper, but also the lower, limit; the norm. I didn't have to be a math whiz to put two and two and shout eureka, hmm, L.A. was not geo-drastically diff. In certain crucial geo-posited ballparks it was/is hardly different at all. On an unsmoggy morn before they put up the highrises, as I drive to work on the freeways of L.A. and Orange Counties, you might indeed have seen forev in any of several directions: hence the onus of smog.

To the inhabitants of L.A., smog is a Cultural phenomenon; smog as negative “health” referent is culturaler still. Before I’d ever set EYES upon Kansas, I was convinced that L.A. was its cultural Capital, that Kansas was in fact THAT WHICH Los Angeles, California, was the sole and logical capital of. Its principal industry made films “about” Kansas, based “in” Kansas, to be consumed by “Kansas” (or some such mid-American shuck).

But here I was in KANSAS, literal Kansas, and godamighty there were too many, too many, too many points of literal concurrence: the flat, the groomed, the fake forever, the ontologically shitfaced-boring (masked as Divine). Outside Emporia, a billboard demands: “You must be born again.” Please! indeed! by all means! yuh yuh. But don’t, on the life of your ma, let H’wood film it, script it, cast it, buy it, precurse it, prefigure it, or. The temptations are immense I know (mythic congruence is Mythic Congruence; Ameri-Jesus bucks are ameri-jesus Bucks), buh buh but.

Then I pulled into Wichita, a compulsory petrol/pee/minimum daily caloric requirement stop, and it’s like I was REALLY there. The cultural cum physical L.A. Malls, sprawl, thoroughfares, burgercruise, vacant faces/posed, ill-fitting clothing as statement of UNIVERSE, let’s-pretend-we’re-a-city-while-a-large-box-of-macaroni-would-probably-fool-us-as-well, nothing to block or filter the killer sun (which blinds, maims, causes cancer).

And which came first? (a dipshit might ask) — film? concept? chicken? California? kansas? egg? But the answer is too, too (boo hoo) obvious. ‘Tis generic, ‘tis Ameri-generic, and that which is generic is no grander, no hepper, no more life-nurturing than THIS.

This Kansas in Oct. as I drive and see lines, I see telephone lines, but I don’t see no linemen. “I hear you singing through the wire, I can hear you through the whine” — I’d give years off my life to hear “Wichita Lineman.” And I’d give more than that for the code by which nothing yields something.

For the first time all trip, though, I find — past tense — found me some sync. Saturday, fall, college football: Kansas vs. Kansas State. Two crummy teams (3-2 vs. 1-4) but still, a tradition. Intrastate. Just before the half, K-State leading, I passed a billboard, “Kansas Beef — Famous and Nutritious,” and at the half, no lie, radio guest was media director for the Kansas Beef Council. He didn’t say “famous” but he coughed out “nutritious.”

Hereford,

Texas.

in the mirror when I turn my head I can spot a cowlick

and there's probably

cowbirds

somewhere

if I knew what

they looked like.

ditto for cowfish

and cowflies

don't know if cowsnakes

exist or cow

clouds but my belt is cowhide

so pardon me while I cower (I'm a coward at heart).

And the best piss stop was Panhandle, Texas, this gas station w/out self-serve run by an affable hydrocephaloidish lout who kept running between the pumps and the Cowboys pregame show on a dinky antique black & white. Over a huge swath of wall he or someone had scribbled FLUSH THE TOILIT ASHOLE, which seemed redundant (or worse) in light of the bowl's nonstop gush.

Tobacco juice trickled off Hydro's lip as he scraped and wiped Kansas and Oklahoma off my windshield. Eyeing my alien plates, he farrowed his brow, shook his head, spat and finally asked: "Where y'all from?"

"Rhode Island?"

"Where in hell is that?"

"Oh, kind of northeast. Beyond New York."

"What's it like?"

"Well" — furrowing my own brow, quickly taking in the local nada — "to tell you the truth, it's exactly like this." (Bleak, mankindforesaken, an opening scene — let's say — from Paris, Texas.)

"That's inner-est-ing to know! Y'all have a nice day." (And when they pay him to rewrite the motto for Texas plates, it no doubt will read: "Texas — the place like everyplace else.")

I've always liked Texas. And/or loathed it in a Wrestling sort of way. Its bluster either plays or it doesn't. Been there umpteen times — to Dallas, Houston, Austin — the bluster of Culture. But never, 'til now, to Amarillo, West Texas, where the bluster wears neither denim nor dick: the bluster of nekkid Land.

After all these states where residential mythos did not exactly jibe with the lay of the land, it was refreshing to see a hand dealt where A equaled A. Since Pennsylvania, excluding Missouri and a couple of urban accidents adjacent to rivers, a suspension of disbelief had seemed called for in cozying up to the question WHY HERE? Why a bunch of Euros would come here for this and, having come, why they'd settle for this — property-as-theft notwithstanding — or even tell their children's children they did.

Britain predates Rome — Stonehenge and all such truck. You wanna talk Brit mytho-history, you're talking archetypes, paradigms, psychic protoplasts; the "existence" of a Richard the Lionhearted no more cries for "verification" than does that of a Zeus or a Thor. But Indiana, Ohio, Kansas: none of these designated regions of habitation seem more than theoretically livable NOW, and you wonder what subspecies of migratory Humankind could have deemed them so THEN — a scant (non-prehistoric) 200-300 annums past. BOOKS tell you 'bout wagons and families, oxen and men, ladies in burlap dresses w/ heirlooms in their tore up socks singing (in French, Bohunk, Norwegian) Indiana, here we come. I mean pshaw, I ain't debating the veracity of such claims — no sir, no ma'am, not me. But the Land, the Land in Question, does not meet the Legend halfway or even a third.

Hey: pre-interstate travel must've been a fucker; the source of many odd quirks of spatiotemporal duh-duh. (Mere jetlag has caused teams to lose NBA championships.) AMERICAN GEO-HISTORY: last of the Eleusinian Mysteries???

All of which is but buildup for the author's unconditional seal of approval (& firm, sweaty handshake) for West Texas qua PLACE. The no-pretense, no-alibi turf of not exactly "tough guys" (though that couldn't hurt), uh, let us say "outlaws," "renegades," no-home-on-earth "misfits," "sleazebuckets," "desperadoes." Maverick: a motherless calf. "Mavericks" too. Such folk are eminently credible now/credible then. And the land: NO comfort from the land (only whiskey, orgaz, beer, the Cowboys on Sundays).

No sissy, macho, jaycee, godswilling "immigrants" need apply.

And then: the Void.

Hours and hours (& hours) of New Mexico.

The major Nowhere that minor nowheres far and wide unwittingly aspire to, that select 1000-miles-from-nowhere watering holes and buzzard farms are by the luck of the draw a thousand miles from. Before this little jaunt, I'd been to fringe outpost India, to rural Quebec in Jack London winter, out on the Pacific with naught on the horizon but horizon. But aside from an occasional psychic mass disjuncture, I'd never felt this far afield from human-content Earth.

Hundredmile after hundredmile went by with few, if any, signs of Life. Fewer exits, fewer billboards, nary a trailer camp, no visible crops, maybe three-four cows, calves or colts the entire run. But rocks a-plenty, and dry creeks and red clay and sky. You drive along and the basic detail, the only detail, is lifeless plethora, inanimate muchness: a planet complete — and completely full — before dinosaurs, or before mastodons, at least before Stonehenge's grandpa breathed its breath. Everywhere you look it's the Grand Canyon, sure, but hardly — experientially, "existentially" — a souvenirable postcard snap thereof. "Details" as microminutiate Americana neither register nor compute.

And you think of all the fraudulent mileage Ansel Adams got from such topography: selecting, juxtaposing, framing, exposing silly rectangles of film with great American coffee-table intent. Romancing the stone, indeed! (Or maybe — great American benefit o' the doubt — it was a grand act of Dada, a Man Ray multiple imaging of

this-rather-than-that-but-what's-the-diff?) Me, myself, I prefer the fly-by-my-car of structurally imposing an-ciency which NO MAN, certainly not an American, EVER BUILT. And I'm not saying "God" did either.

Hey, this ain't even "untamed wilderness" (who, or what, would a missionary talk to, mesas? raindrops? drops in temperature?) — it's the Moon, the Void. And in this void, Nothing — no assortment of nth-percentile rules or expectations — applies. Among the smattering of standard-issue whitebread humans who actually live here are those who not only build domes and hold annual artso film rites, some (we're told) even worship the devil. Most,

I'm sure, also worship money, exploit in-juns and vote for a-holes, but who said life was perfect — even in a perfect void?

Arizona, next up, had three things going for it, three one-ups on every Place else on my map. It was the only state with a dead porcupine, a snowpeaked mountain (outside Flagstaff) or a Navajo country station (the jocks spoke Navajo, the news and commercials were Navajo ... then they'd play Ronnie Milsap). Basically, though, until Kingman, Arizona was little more than an extension of New Mexico, a more groomed and color-coordinated New Mexico ... the Santa Barbara version (if you know what I mean) of No Place, really.

Kingman, though, was the doorway, the anteroom, to Someplace. California's sudden nearness was all too loud 'n' palpable, its grimy orange extending well 'cross state lines to tempt and beckon every local Eve Adams (soon to star in a made-for-TV erection). If it snatches them in from New York and Paris, what chance you wanna give a poor dusty burg with Dreams so poor, so dusty it's actually named one of its larger streets ANDY DEVINE AVENUE? "Hey, Wild Bill, wait for me!" — how's that for desert role-model wish-hopin'!

smog in the desert, BLUH-colored mtns.

BLUH-colored

earth

busted

bottles at the foot of

joshua

trees:

make this your California trip,

Bobby Troup!

(kick yo' ass up the ghost ass of Route 66)

It's a good thing the scientist in me got to catch & sniff both Jersey and California in a single week. Immediate sensory evidence can sometimes be useful; the memory romanticizes too damn much. For ten years I'd held to the notion that New Jersey and partner-in-crime Manhattan were atmospherically grimmer on an average day than L.A. on its life-snuffing worst. Well I dunno from average, or even from worst, but 30 yards (or some such figure) from Needles it was already smog-gier (by a fanciful factor like 50) than the N.J./N.Y. of not only five days previous, but of drastically mismemorized days of yore. And this was just desert, for fug sake; L.A. the "city" was still 250 miles down the road.

I'd never before approached California, Southern or otherwise, from this direction — a preferred route for Dust Bowlers and, one assumes, the author of "Route 66." Gateway to the garden (of Eden), to the pot (of etc. at rainbow's end). Well, seeing how tawdry and ugghgggly the damn thing could be, and finally knowing in fact where it came from (from turf more pure, interesting and "spectacular" than itself; from Nothing which knows its Being and its Place), I instantly KNEW — evidence enough — that the California Ruse must predate even the film industry. Realtors thought it up, or historians. Lying to keep from crying! Well, Mary Jean, I'm sure it 'll pick up when we get to the sea...

Follow... the sun.

And I did a 2nd take on Kansas: it had its reasons. Agriculture, physical isolation — reasons for being bland, modular, unaware. Southern California has no reasons; none, that is, dealt by geographic, geologic reality. In matters of mindset and heartset, Southern Cal is geography denied.

Or maybe it was just my dread of returning Home.

I'd been so long in transit, and it felt so okay, that I really didn't want to stop, and certainly not here. Around Pomona or Ontario, the smog so thick you could barely read the signs, traffic slowed, crawled: first traffic jam of the trip. Which made sense. All a venue of ALL CARS can offer, in the end, is the illusion of transit; cars become geography, er, real estate; the smallest units of propertied immobility. Or some such lunacy, some fitting Jim Morrison terminalism (to celebrate my less-than-joyous reentry).

This was the end, it hadn't been too rough a haul, and I realized two things. One, that Jack Kerouac's biggest problem was he didn't drive, that by depending too exclusively on others for both general mobility and immediate vectors into and out of place-coded situations and experiences, he was ultimately consigned to a sensibility — as both writer and man — too monochromatically that of the Passenger: passive and/or "out of control," restless of hand and foot, unaccountable, "not responsible." Heck, I'd only really had one car problem all trip (in a storm in New Mexico it didn't start, then did), and I hardly ever drove at night, so I'm not talking courage, adventure, tough-guy stuff, or any of that. The daily stresses of wheeling into nasty setting suns, of holding a curve while holding in a wicked number-one, were challenging but by no means immense. The rewards were, big deal, rewarding.

But the whole thing is more than plus/minus, than a series of small but concrete "achievements." By handing the reins over to the Lew Welches and Neal Cassadys, what Jack missed out on was a heap of ORIENTATION. A means of viewing activity, basic functional NORMAL activity, from a vantage point which is also its CUTTING EDGE: the Zen of merely driving. An easy one (and, again, no big deal), but throughout life, except for rare practice spins, the King of the Beats was too cheesed out to bother.

Two: New York and L.A. are not contiguous. That's with a g ("adjoining, adjacent"); and, with an n, nor are they continuous ("linearly connected") by connections other than instantaneous: airplanes, TV. No surface passage is quick enough or smooth enough to pull it off, so you've gotta fly (or plug into network poison). "Bicoastal" scumbags (and watchers of networks) are the bane of both coasts. That's it.

'Bye.

No, wait, THE NATIONAL BIRD should be the CROW. After catching its act in every state I crossed, the case with no other feathered friend, not even the sparrow, I feel

very strongly about this. The racial implications alone (they're black, right?) could be far-reaching. Write your congressman and dump the eagle NOW! □

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Best Of

Charles Mingus snarled at Richard Meltzer

A tale of two CDs

Author

Richard Meltzer

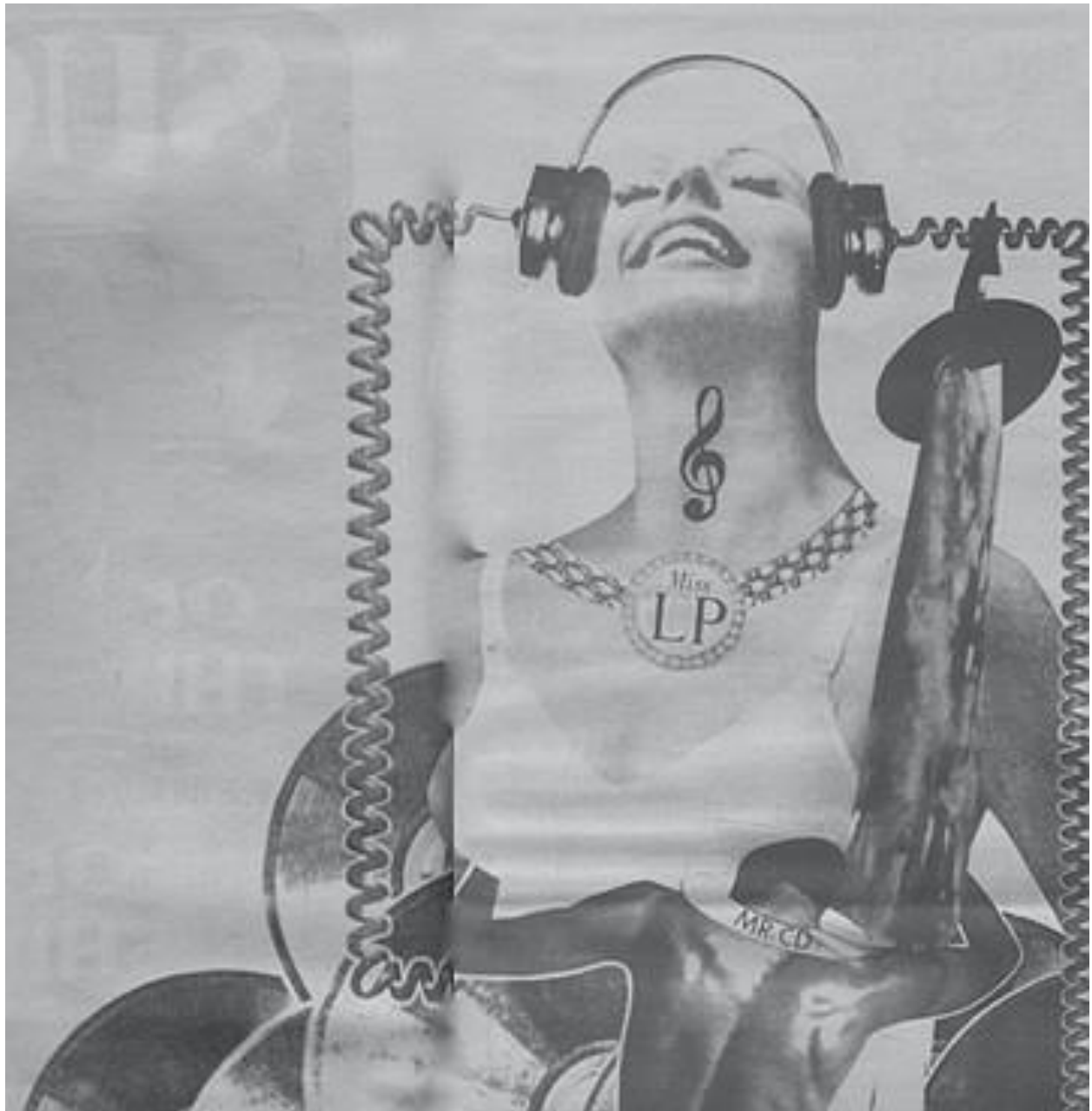
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Music scene

JOY AS I KILL IT

Hi, returning your... Oh hi, I'm having another rock trivia game tomorrow night and I... *Where'd, who gave you my number?* George. Is that okay? *Well, there's not much I can ...* What I was hoping, 'cause the questions are so lame, the songs they use, I'm making my own tape, and George is gonna make one — could you make a tape? *I don't think there's time, uh, why's it have to be rock trivia? It's the game itself that's lame. What would you rather play, poker?* No, poker is about money and what's rock trivia, "honor"? *I don't really care about either of those this week.* I've never played poker, you have to memorize all the red cards and black cards and the counting. You probably win all the time. *No, I've never actually won an entire, never come out ahead. I haven't played in a long, got no money.*



And the other thing I was calling, you'd be the one to, what's a good McCoy Tyner album? *In his own name?* Yeah. *There aren't any.* I heard his latest and it sounded ... *I think he's awful. He was always a symptom of Coltrane's latent conservatism — can't do without a piano, can't quite shake, no matter how far his music, blow the top off the universe and he still needs to have, not only not even just as a metronome, a compass — 1, 2, 3, 4, give me the changes — but to have somebody there tickling, y'know, being all these by-then superfluous cornball things your average competent piano player still generally tended to be. In terms of sound, his*

*basic attack, to me McCoy Tyner is just a flowery cocktail player with some hardbop pretensions who learns how to maintain, y'know, this required trance pattern Coltrane gave him, this sort of pre-Philip Class repetition module or... What about "My Favorite Things?" Well, okay, at his best, and he played his assigned role perfectly, but it was, in and of, it was so not a big deal you can hear, by '62 you get the same monotonous line done to death, in totally conventional circumstances, by Cedar Walton with Art Blakey. I kind of like his arpeggios on the *Ballads* album.*

*Well that's Coltrane's worst. His worst on Impulse anyway. Oh, I really ... That was the one he did after, Bob Thiele must've, like his Ellington album wasn't somehow evidence enough that he could play mainstream for, he had to do these tinkle-tinklers like "Too Young to Co Steady" and "Nancy with the Laughing Face." I like those. Well, you want ballads, he'd already, well the one after that with Johnny Hartman... I don't know that one. Oh, it's great, it pushes that theme so far it comes out the other end of the squaresville map, and even before that you got "Out of This World" on the Coltrane album, the one just called Coltrane — I don't know that one either. — on Impulse, blue cover, not the one on Prestige — which is a nice over-the-edge, 14 minutes long, not one of these easy-digestible bite-size things like on *Ballads*, more like the cataclysmic stuff on *Live at the Village Vanguard* and *Impressions* ... Those I have. They are good. ... where he's over the edge of, whatever metaphors you want, and Tyner, even there, still hasn't, he's this incredible rhythmic/harmonic drudge, still playing "My Favorite Things" while Coltrane's already a full, whole stage or two beyond that.*

*I mean why Coltrane after a certain point felt he needed any piano for what he was doing is really, the proof he didn't really mean business on *Ascension* ... Got that. But I don't play it. ... is he brings in all these guys, like John Tchicai solos, Archie Shepp and Marion Brown take great solos, all these people blowing, blowing — and this is when blowing your brains out was practically an end in, a priority, that's the context — and he lets McCoy, the straight man of the session, half a step up from Ahmad Jamal, solo too!*

You can't recommend...

*Okay, let me think, there's one on Milestone called, I think it's *Echoes of a Friend*, buncha Coltrane songs, at least it's a familiar reprise of, I'm sure it's out of print. You're talking solos, trios? Yeah, or larger. Well, his, I dunno, quintets, sextets, I can't listen to that shit. His idea of hornplayers — okay, Coltrane fires him, replaces him with someone even worse, his wife Alice, then he's gotta replace — his replacements for Coltrane, he's had some really godawful, Hubert Laws, Gary Bartz, who's he got now, John Blake? The only violinist worse than John Blake, well, okay,*

trios. The first album he did in his own name, 4 Inception, I bought it, no great shakes but it's from that same, when he was still with Coltrane. There's a CD out, two Impulse LPs combined, probably Inception, I'm guessing, Nights of Blues and Ballads, if that's the other one it wasn't terrible.

Speaking of CDs, I just got a Doors CD you might be interest ... I can't stand rock CDs, haven't heard one yet that, whenever I play one side by side with the vinyl the CD always sounds like a blueprint for, uh, like no more than a diagram for what, from the vinyl, I know the true sound to be. Well this doesn't, it's pretty close... I dunno, Elektra, you ever, the only Elektra CD I've heard is Forever Changes, which I used to love and I can't even ... it's so absurdly clear you get details audible that were in the realm of total conjecture, total, wild guesswork on your part, listening, to the original. Well that should be good then. Wasn't, that was an album where details were the best part. Well I'm not, well, details, there was also lots of good murk, the sloppy, murky mix was what the record sonically was. As far as, what you in fact heard, every detail, real or imagined, plugged into, or you extracted it from, this viable dense mess. It wasn't foreground in some brittle diorama with arrows pointing and outlines drawn around everything. Maybe "mess" is the wrong — but also vinyl is just so much warmer, no CD I've heard, even jazz, acoustic stuff, is as warm-sounding as vinyl. This Doors thing isn't very different.

Is it remixed? Remastered. They didn't add bass or bring up the drums or anything? Not so I could tell. It's okay. And there's another one that I know you would like, an unissued Byrds, I forget the... Oh, that thing on, Never Before. Yeah, isn't... I hate that album, somebody sent me the vinyl. It just — how more sleazy can you get than falsifying, it's like Jane Fonda doing her, revising the '60s. Whuddo you mean? Those mixes are from six months ago. You sure? The version of "Eight Miles High" is completely different. The guitar parts are different, the ... Well that's an actual alternate take, they say, although, uh, I mean that biz about "true stereo for the first time"— didn't you read the notes?

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What, they went back to the original four-track and... I dunno, some might be the, I didn't read all, most I think are brand new mixes. Jim Dickson, he was once what, their manager, I don't think he ever produced their, not on Columbia, he and some other guy remixed it. It sounds great, though, "Mr. Tambourine Man," the stereo is ... See, I consider it a travesty to do anything to the original sound. It's a sacred document, you don't fuck with it, who cares if you only heard something in mono, or fake stereo, whatever? It ain't fake if that's how you heard it, and how they released it, for whatever motives or expediencies or.... If it doesn't represent the actual

push-pull, the sociology of a band, working as a band — McCuinn wants this part up, Crosby wants, the A&R creep's fidgeting, Hillman's asleep — what's the point? And anyway, just to toy with, to scare up another nuance, even if you could, now, this far after the fact, is nuts. It's like traveling back in time so Mister Bluster can wear different shoes on an episode of Howdy Doody.

What about the previously unissued cuts? What, "Triad," you gotta hear Crosby do it himself? The lyric isn't, Grace Slick wasn't silly enough? "Never Before," nothing special, you can see why they never, "Thoughts and Words" meets "Don't Make Waves," and even if it isn't why release it now? Why release unissued jazz then? How can ... Well, jazz is more about ongoing, its whole history is the unit — everything is simultaneous — and the rock unit is maybe a moment if even, a micromoment, a succession of barely continuous micro-moments. What's past is dead-dog past, and if it hasn't played the first time, meaning if you haven't internalized it, since you're half of — if it didn't impact on your consciousness then, and your sub, during its brief, allotted uh, it didn't exist. And since it didn't exist, it doesn't exist — there's no rock and roll outside that tearaway, throwaway type of time. You can't put it, shove it back into time if it wasn't there to begin with. I may be one contrary asshole, but there aren't ten rock songs from before I started listening that I later heard that meant anything to me, some Carl Perkins on Sun maybe, a Little Richard or two, but...

I see we disagree.

I guess. Well, when you come over you can tell me what Coltrane albums to get. Should I bring beer? No, I've got, is Corona okay? Yeah, fine. How bout we just sit around and play records? I don't think you'd wanna listen to my live Neil Young bootlegs or... Probably not. I guess we should play. I can't get you to make a tape? There's not really time. Okay, well I'll see you. Yeah. 'Bye. Goodbye.

JOY AS I LIVE IT

A year ago I bought a CD player for the same reason I'm about to spend a half-year's rent on a word processor: because it's compulsory. Technology as mass extortion: pay or be removed from the cultural map. In two shakes of a gnat's ass they won't be MAKING RECORDS anymore, not the majors, not even the minors. Most minors, in fact, American jazz labels especially (distributors in Japan, the most significant current market for jazz, won't handle vinyl, won't touch it), are already issuing CD-only releases. And what do the fuckers cost, \$12.99 list? Not to mention the grievous end prospect of what?to?do? with all the albs you've accumulated, including treasures and arcana — they can't reissue everything— unlikely in any

possible world to see the light of CD being. (What, that is, except stock up in styluses before they stop selling *them*.) Woe woe woe — but they are good for some things....

Twenty-three, no, twenty-four years ago, the winter-spring before the so-called Summer of Love, I was a first-year graduate student at Yale, soon to become a former grad student. Following a semester of academic serendipity, lacing papers on Kant, Spinoza, C.S. Fteirce et al with florid yet on-the-dime references to rock rock rock (and roll), thus laying the groundwork, unbeknownst to etc., for Rock Criticism as we now sadly know it, I'd been told, "Straighten up" — i.a, read and reread my Kant, Spinoza, Peirce and scribble lifeless treatments with reference to nothing but same — "or you're out." As I had no intention of straightening up — I mean Jesus *fuck* I was on a roll, a mission, enriching the textual gamut, the palette!, of Philosophy f'r crying out loud — all that remained was to take more drugs and spin my LPs, piss more people off, aimlessly wander grim gray New Haven, and spend my last fellowship check on every LP, British or American, current or old, I didn't already have.

Copping three-four at a time (no newies till every purchase had been *absorbed*, memorized), it took me a while, which is prob'ly what kept me from splitting till April, but by the time I was done I'd acquired such hotstuff as the first Doors, the Left Banke, Buffalo Springfield, the Yardbirds' *Over Under Sideways Down*, Velvet Underground & Nico, the first two by both the Fugs and the Airplane, first Mothers, Who and Tims Hardin and Buckley, *Love* and *Da Capo*, Donovan's *Sunshine Superman* and *Mellow Yellow* (and the 45 of "Epistle to Dippy" '), two or three early Dylans that for whatever reasons hadn't previously tempted me, *Got Live if You Want It!* (already had *Between the Buttons* — natch), *Pet Sounds*, two copies (just to be safe) of "Strawberry Fields"/"Penny Lane," *Them Again*, the Moody Blues' *Go Now!*, the Association's *Renaissance* (containing "Pandora's Golden Heebie Jeebies")... and my final buy, a week before packing my booty and scrambling, was the Byrds' *Younger Than Yesterday*. A shitload, all told, of some good, great shit that could've, should've, and in fact probably *did* save the world — to the extent that it even made it past the '60s — a great 'n' glorious time for music (bulk-manifesting limitless Possibility) and little, ultimately, else. Rockroll certainly has a great future behind it — and the future is *then*.

Ever-generous asshole (and messianic putz) that I was, I would share this bounty with fellow philo gradpersons, those of "my" generation, or at least my age, whenever poss. I'd invite them to my room, tweedy jackjoes who would finish every thought with "as it were" and probably (from tenured easyseats at UC San Fug-gawugga and Princeton) still do, fight them a joint, their first and probably last, and show/tell 'em

the "reiterated meta-tongue fadeout" in the Byrds' "If You're Gone" or "osmotic tongue pressure" in "Doctor Robert." They'd cough, look at me like I was a goddam comedian, and ask me to play (once again) the "dirty parts" of "Homemade Shit" by the Fugs. It was a lonely life. Needless to say, I didn't get laid much. Of the fewer than ten women in the department, the only one whose mushpie I actively pursued, a third-year student whom I'd made out with once at a sherry party, and who herself was pursuing ways to avoid a Heidegger thesis, was interested in me solely, it turned out, for my "stuff" — weed not stalkmeat. Which anyway brings us, me, you-me, to topic number one of this piece.

Lovelessness. Or lovelost-ness. Or whatever the fuck, *recalled*. Sonically.

'Cuz in addition to being wretchedly unwanted at frigging Yale I was at the same time, or a half-step off, being knocked pillar to post by the heartbreak of Heart break: breakup with the first great love o' my life, my college sweetheart Marthy. Trueloveforever!, truelovefor-ever!, meatlove/eatlove, the whole package — two years' worth (or a year and 2/3) — then she ran off and married her math professor. Waited till after the last final of my senior year (so I wouldn't flunk it: gee, thanx), then went off with this weasel to Massachusetts. I hadn't seen it coming. Devastated, leveled, life not worth a thimble of roach pus. A summer of gloom, tears and shit, new Beatles/Stones/Dylan LPs out and no one to share 'em with. It was her I'd lived it all with, from boy-girl to Absolute-unfolds-Itself, the first time through. Heart — mind — body — soul — w/ rock & roll sinew and flavor. Double withdrawal!

At the Beatles' Shea Stadium show in August I ran into her with the weasel... "Howzit going?" *Yowch*. Weeks passed, I got her address, strained letters back and forth, then suddenly less strain, gratuitous buzzwords of (possibly genuine) ardor, culminating in she writes to say she's coming back — Thanksgiving — can't live without me, a grave mistake, now we'll be together always — Then of course she calls (as I'm just about to leave to meet her bus) to say, "I'm not coming back. I'm hanging up and leaving the phone off the hook. Don't try to reach me. I will never see or speak to you again."

Which isn't strictly true — she burned me again in '72 — but for our mythic purposes here, close enough. As the years marched by I would never listen to anything by James Taylor (same surname as her husband) or Jesse Winchester (same face). So anyway I'm in New Haven, '66 into '67, winter into spring, dual griefs befouling the air of my room. Dual cooties, e.g., yellow roses, dried, lying where I tossed them, fresh, the afternoon she failed to reappear; the 58-page "Philosophy of Science from a Pop Perspective," inside, exactly as submitted, a Beatles VI album cover, returned ungraded by the late Norwood Russell Hanson (may he suffer eternal AIDS in hell).

Inhaling their fading but still potent effluvia I play side two of *Younger Than Yesterday*, then take an uncommonly pleasant springtime stroll, thinking *I don't need this shit* and, slightly later, *OK, I'm outa here*. Ivy exit track — I'll never forget it — the Byrds.

Fast forward to September: a new ladyfriend (Julie) whom I will remain with, for better and/or worse, for the next, oh, many years; new Byrds single ("Lady Friend"), which I will hear but a handful of times, all on radio, and never fully absorb.

The decades pass like decades...

Slowly and not so surely I've grown accustomed to CD. I could still give a flying hoot for any hypothetical advances in drawing room "sound quality" — with my cheesy speakers you would hardly hear the diff — but it does appeal to me that *without destroying* a recording you can now actually play something enough times in real time to hammer it into your consciousness, suspend it in your blood. To love an album, a side, a cut, is no longer to kill or maim it — as I did with too many if not all of my '60s favorites. Nor is it necessary anymore to endure entire recordings or sides just to get at individual 2-minute-30-sec-ond treasures (or not-so-treasures) in repeat mode. With direct access to the unit cut you can gut-check and audition to your heart's content, and replay ultimate good'uns till you (but not they) drop. It was due to this latter option, and this alone, that I got to again, or at last, meet up with "Lady Friend."

Some song, geez. Gotta be David Crosby's best. "Here it comes again, the night is going to fall, here it comes, she's going to say goodbye" — wow, a rejection tune! But with a certain hoky defiance, an affirmative oompah to the dumb side, the Crosby side, of arrogant — there's always another groupie, right? (a term and concept barely even coined yet): "She's going to go and take her trinkets, and I will *HAVE TO LIVE WITHOUT HER* and survive" ... sounds do-able. Played in a sinister minor (with overdubbed horns and some of the best drumming ever on a Byrds track) but the feeling, you'd hafta admit, is up. Very. As transcendent of lovelost as "Fun, Fun, Fun" had been of loss of vehicular bounty. Universe of pain and rapture! Great single, great song.

Which I never bought because I figured, well, it would end up on an album. But when Crosby, notorious a-hole and blowhard even then, left the band, it became expendable, didn't make it onto *Notorious Byrd Brothers* (on which it would have fit *perfectly*), and slipped through the cracks for umpteen years. It might've been on some Columbia singles compilation — dunno, I wasn't buying rock albs by then. A couple years ago, when somebody sent me a pressing of *Never Before on Re-Flyte*,

with "Lady Friend" (in "clear, true stereo," i.e., brand new, historically ersatz stereo — Crosby himself helped Jim Dickson remix it) the last cut on side two, I played the whole thing once and mostly just huff-puffed about its messing with precious sonic documents. It wasn't till they sent me the CD (on Murray Hill, whatever that is — the copyright says CBS Special Products) that I overcame my aversion to such messin', or if I didn't overcome it in principle, at least I didn't have to encounter it, experience it, in A-B-C-D vinylsacred bulk, and — heck — a CD is a toy, so I played with it.

Picking/choosing this, trying/retrying that — hardly in earnest but fuggit — I halfassed my way through the mutha. Couldn't work up much affection for the 45 version of ' "Why" in true stereo, 'specially since I knew it so well (as B-side of "Eight Miles High") in true mono, but the remixed "Lady Friend" was something I could deal with. Since I didn't really *know* it from its first incarnation, certainly hadn't memorized it, there was little chance (on a pure Sense Memory level) for me to be mortally wounded by any sonic renuancing, and I quickly warmed to the opportunity thus presented me: to hear/learn/get off on/be done with a time-coded (but not time-dispersed) genuine hot one for essentially the First Time. (The version of "Lady Friend" on *The Byrds*, the 90-tune, 4-CD box set from Columbia, might, for all I know — though I doubt it — be in original mono. But with so many wounds in the offing from even "remasters" of standard Byrds oeuvre — which if I had the damn thing in my hands I'd be tempted to play — I'm not about to risk even borrowing the fucker to find out.)

So I play it now, play it many times a day, haven't tired of it yet though I know f'r sure I will, must, and each time I hear it MUCH is triggered that nothing else in my collection, my vast arsenal of sonic googahs, can match. Dunno or care why but it does: a recollective thought/feel package, gestalt, whose vivid components are rock qua music (a music to which I in fact *have* no present-tense allegiance, relationship), rock history, rock mystery, lost love, lust love, release from both bad love and the great chain of educational bondage & servitude, the finally (for a day) nonfetid air of coastal Connecticut, and somuchmore ... a flash on a day, a moment, five months before its release, in a miserable yet hopeful April when infinite Possibility was topically thinkable (compared to now when *nothing* is remotely possible, surely not in rock and roll, ha, any more than anything of even microworth is possible/thinkable on TV or in national — state — local — American politics or you name it), when the prospect of dealing with the draft loomed as a griefgrim ordeal and a half but in some ways a thinkable snap, when had I not soon fallen into the lovelorn trap of succumbing to e-z relationship I'd've been fucking ten thousand hippie chicks on DMT, when at bottom-line least goddam MUSIC (rock music) was a light still verymuch on in the World, a Torch held high!, mere seconds (as planet luck would have it) before flickering forever Out forever g'bye... all triggered by the replay

of a SONG, a song in fact by — all critiques in — a somewhat topheavily (and less than multipurpose) Apollonian studio band that couldn't play live to save its life ... pure joy!

BEFORE AND AFTER ROCK

The only time I ever really tried to speak to Charles Mingus, he snarled at me. It was at a Christmas party given by *Changes* magazine, for which I sometimes wrote — they paid \$35 for features, \$15 or maybe it was only \$10 for reviews — and whose editor, publisher, whatever she was, Susan Graham, a quasi-stunning Older Woman (older than me) for whom I kind of had this wild hunger, and to manifest it once offered my palm as an ashtray only to recoil in reflex idiot disgrace, also managed Mingus, managed him well before she had anything to do with the crummy mag. The 17-minute "Sue's Changes," on *Changes One*, is his tribute to both her and the mag, though by the time it was released, '75, the mag (if I recall right) was no more. Party must've been like '72, '73, she had him play piano and make eggnog, and he didn't snarl much when I told him, "Great eggnog," but did when I asked if what he'd just played was Monk's "Ruby My Dear." "No! it's an original composition!" — it sure *sounded* like "Ruby My Dear" — snarled and I applaud him.

Ashes since '79, Mingus was a great, great — all-time, world-class — truculent shithhead; perhaps the loudest, and without doubt the most consistently interesting, of the mid to late century's Last Angry Men; a *toweringly* great musician and man. Arguably the most significant innovator, if that's the word, in jazz history whose most tangible innovations were not *formalist* in nature (or is he simply the most significant jazz artist to this minute whose alterations in the fabric of being weren't principally formal?) (though of course he even was a formalist, an avantformal *monster*, hut tut tut), he is probably best viewed as, OK, I'll list it: a Force of Nature, an *élan vital*, like Muhammad Ali or Babe Ruth; jazz's single greatest footsoldier, a battler for every inch of turfs musical, social, ego-personal, transmammal-emotional, economic; a matchless drill sergeant too, lathering colleagues to a fine ferocity, driving them, prodding them, in countless cases, to the musical jagged-edge peak of their lives; one of only three bassplayers (the others: John Kirby, Oscar Pettiford) (if you want, throw in Charles Haden: four) to actually lead a consistently viable series of combos (of *any* size); the man who, at a time when hard-bop/funk excess had left the Duke in momentary eclipse, when even lame, anachronistic white bands were sponging more exclusively from Basie, made the world again Safe for Ellington; the sole purveyor of a '50s funk variation to force the issue into overkill without overkilling (or even killing); a rare self-professed, as opposed to media-designated, satyr in life and art who could handle sexual overstatement as *foreground* without risk of corniness (bass as sexual correlative:

hmm...okay); a master fomenter, and true appreciator, of Chaos (as both fount and destination); a more thorough summer-up of ALL of jazz history — the entire haul as serviceably *simultaneous* — than any contemporary, including Monk, and even possibly the Art Ensemble of Chicago (who come directly out of Mingus anyway); first jazzperson per se to frontally acknowledge, musically, *nonpejoratively*, the coeval presence-on-earth of rock & roll (and I'm not talking R&B).

Which, this last point, is not at all to say he was into "fusion." By the time of "Lady Friend," of psychedelic music and the late British Invasion, rock had become a *dominant* presence in more ways than sound. In terms of marketplace it was basically *the* official music in America, dislodging all else from the front and even middle of an evergrowing work-scrounge line, hogging the club scene, copping the lion's share of recording contracts, the suddenly fatter advances, the only real promotion, airplay, etc. The late '60s were a sad time to be a working jazz stiff in this country. Half in desperation cum windfall-wish, half from protodemographic savvy, Miles Davis, on the same label as the Byrds — not to mention Blood, Sweat and Tears — if for a decade longer, decided that if they could do it, he could do it, and he did: capital-F Fusion. But neither cynical Miles nor non-cynical survivalists like Ellington (who cut a less-than-fab "I Want to Hold Your Hand" for *Ellington* '66) and Basie (whose Basie on the Beatles had liner notes by Ringo) exactly understood rock and roll — it was simply another pop fad, the latest topical wellspring of "material" — certainly didn't/couldn't *appreciate* it as much more than consumer-friendly produce for young dolts. The only one who understood/appreciated *rock qua rock* was Mingus, and he'd been there for years. "Pithecanthropus Erectus" ('56), "Open Letter to Duke" ('59, reprising a riff from the '57 "Nouroog"), and "Hog Callin' Blues" ('61) are inconceivable without the euphoric whimwham, the A-to-Z insta-gallop, of early rock, of any rock...

And Mingus *before* rock?

Funny you should ask. 'Cause I've got this massive Mingus set a-sittin' on my table if not my lap just begging to be reviewed — *The Complete Debut Recordings* from those jolly repackagers at Fantasy. TWELVE CDS: an act of extortion if ever there was one (sizable chunks're separately available on 5 Original Jazz Classics CDs, a Prestige CD, and/or 10 in-print LPs, but if you want it all, or are a completist sap and must have it all, you'll have to hold your breath — or shell out \$153.70), but what the hey. 'S not even complete, an entire '53 session's been left off, but it is damn fucking, *damn* fucking valuable — if you've got none of it already, it's worth every penny. Or even if you've got some or most in scratchy vinyl, hey, you might only be half neurotic to stare ahead at a dawn without turntables, in-whichcase to have the whole mess on CD would hardly seem that big a ripoff, more like an investment —

although who knows, how long's CD itself gonna last? (The choice is yours — me no skill.)

In any event: Mingus from '51 to '57, on a small, gallant label run by him, his wife Celia, drummer Max Roach, and Max's gal Margo, playing/fomenting/recording (as both leader and sideman) precisely, as close as could be executed, what he as the world's most demanding fuck bloody well wanted, or thought he wanted. There's this great album he later did for Mercury, *Pre Bird*, consisting of material mostly written before he'd encountered Charlie Parker. By similar token, this could be subtitled *Pre Rock*. Let's take a look.

Piano trios. Six of 'em. Spaulding Givens, an L.A. chum of C.M.'s who appears also in duet with him, isn't toomuch more than a midrange cocktail tinkler (not here anyway). John Dennis, facile in a nonannoying Hampton Hawes sort of way, is listenable, and his tune "Seven Moons" is okay. The always fine Hank Jones only plays "You Go to My Head" — he's fine. Paul Bley, in his U.S. studio debut, does a chordally interesting (i.e., "weird") reading of "Walkin' " and interesting (a/k/a *complicated*) takes on "I Can't Get Started" and "Like Someone in Love"; on "Spontaneous Combustion" he is one hip, glib whiteboy — at least a hipper, more mobile (less chunky) Dave Brubeck. The underrated (and largely forgotten) Hazel Scott, probably, when *on*, the second greatest of female jazz pianists, is here (for the most part) very much on. The six trio cuts with Bud Powell, the greatest of them all, period, from the first half of the '53 Massey Hall concert also featuring Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Mingus and Max (more on which later), are way better, for my money, than any live transcriptions of Art Tatum, and just about up there with the hottest live Cecil Taylors. Through all of this, Mingus's bass has a vivid mammal presence, his line often (always?) just a tad away from a full-bellied groan in much the same way early jazz trombone tended to slip into elephant-fart territory with no warning and no reason to warn. Roaring vegetables too — max wood-thunk from his ax qua wood. Makes it tough for even wimp piano players to sound, what's the wd? ... effete. (Gotta be *the* piano-trio bassist.)

Bone city. Ninety-one minutes of continuous modern elephant farting somewhere in Brooklyn w/ J.J. Johnson, Kai Winding, Bennie Green, and Willie Dennis. Not exactly monotonous, but of interest more for the whacked-out monolithic concept than for actual prolonged sonic bravado. As writ and performed, Spaulding Givens's "Trombosphere" is not half bad (& la lots of late-'40s "nightlife music"), but Mingus's hepcat anthem "Chazzanova" is the real stopper. Plus: a four-song EP date (with four outtakes), previously available only in Denmark, by the greatest white trombonist after Jack Teagarden, Jimmy Knepper (whose last name, claim the liner notes, means "fuck" in Danish). *Nice*.

Massey Hall — with and without. Unlike Louis Armstrong, who rarely, once he'd gained full harness of his galaxy-shattering, universe-manifesting mettle, worked alongside more than one (at most two?) musicians at a time of even remote synoptic equivalence, Charlie Parker worked often with equal coconspirators, Massey Hall being perhaps the best example (certainly the most conspicuous evidence) on record. A great, great, great, great document of a great, great, great, great show. It may well be that the whole thing was released sometime somewhere without Mingus's subsequent overdubs of his own bass parts — in listening to playback he'd found them largely inaudible — but if so (and nowhere in the package is any of it referred to as "previously unreleased"), I'd never heard it until now. Finally hearing the nonoverdub incarnation *could* have been like hearing some new Bird for the first time, always a thrill, and with less unearthed newstuff all the time (he's been dead since '55) prob'ly the best new Bird in years. Could, but wurn't — sounds about the same. (What the hey...)

Bass and cello. Of course you don't have t' play 'em all, but four dull takes (three previously unissued) of "Bass-ically Speaking," from the Massey Hall overdub session, are a tougher row to hoe than even the six takes of "Night in Tunisia" on the Complete *Lennie Tristano* CD on Keynote. Four cuts of Oscar Pet-tiford, Mingus's direct link to Jimmy Blanton (*the* progenitor of modern bass — dead at 21 in '42), on cello are not unbearable.

Lousy vocalists. Don Senay is dogfood, and his arrangements (by Alonzo Levister) are like a trip to the dentist circa '55 — what he'd've had on the radio while drilling. The Gordons (Honey, Richard, George, George Jr.) are a wind-up paisley corduroy dog toy you wanna KICK. Bob Benton is a block of cork. Janet Thurlow isn't wretched. Jackie Paris's "Make Believe" is "The Big Hurt" Goes Boho, and his "Paris Is Blue" is "Lush Life" Goes Straight (and Meets "One for the Road").

A good Miles session. A Miles session so unlike any other Miles session (trombone, vibes, no piano, Elvin Jones on drums) that, had it been on as widely distributed a label as *Birth of the Cool* (or even "Walkin' "), it would probably have been of "seminal import." (Soon he would be on Columbia, where *everything* for awhile would have seminal import, even if — in spite or not of itself — as Makeout Music.) Pleasant "atmospheric" versions of "There's No You" and "Nature Boy."

Early Thad Jones. My pick for most underrated trumpeter of the last 40 yrs. His '60s-70s big band with Mel Lewis was really no great shakes, nor was his playing by then, and his work with Basie was competent though hardly remarkable, but he played some outstanding shit on *Five by Monk by Five*, three albums under his own

name for Blue Note, and the two Debut sessions here, the earliest of the bunch and probably not the best — but still mighty fine.

Hours (and hours) of Jazz Workshop. About 2:45:00 from a '55 Cafe Bohemia date and 1:00:00 from an unreleased '57 workout with the feel, no joke, of early Sun Ra (esp. the "untitled original composition" by Shafi Hadi). Hot licks, cold licks, all the dualities in an existentially untempered, experientially feasible nutshell: "freedom and discipline," "violence and tenderness," "agony and ecstasy," "pathos and bathos" ... whatever.

Unused soundtrack for a Cassavetes film. Buncha guys banging on things and blowing whistles for seven minutes. The obvious precursor, both sonically and spiritually, to dozens of albums by members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music, the Black Artists Group, the Creative Musicians Improvisors Forum, etc., etc., and to hundreds (thousands!) by postdrugcrazed Euros and denizens of the Knitting Factory.

And that's about it. On a scale of 0 to 100, I'd give the whole thing an 82. Or a 78. Let's call it 80.

AFTER AFTER ROCK

And though Mingus's influence *on* rock is of course negligible, "Pithecanthropus Erectus" does make a phenomenal segue into (or from) "Third Stone from the Sun" by Jimi Hendrix. Jimi being more the Mingus of Rock than (as some heps would have it) the Coltrane?? Or some such horseshit.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer golfs at Torrey Pines

Life is a layable lie

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[June 11, 1987](#)

Sports



Richard Meltzer playing golf with various rich old men and discussing the game with them

It should be evident that golf, and especially golf with Bob Hope, has given me as much enjoyment, relaxation and laughter as anything else in my life. Golf is a great game that has grown because of the many purposes it serves.

— Gerald R. Ford, foreword to Bob Hope's *Confessions of a Hooker: My Lifelong Love Affair with Golf*

That was the trouble with golf, I thought. Only a golfer could ever understand why anyone would play the stupid, fucking game.

— Dan Jenkins, *Dead Solid Perfect*

A communications code word for the letter g.

— 2nd definition of golf in Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

... and then as the ball lands, oh, no more than two feet from the pin, Greg slaps your back, hard, Gregory Corso the poet. "Great shot!" — slap. A turtle is dislodged from your pocket. One of those small ones, two small ones. You reach for your center-shaft putter. Greg, ever the card, says, "You 're gonna putt? You 're gonna putt?! Well, you must be some kind of putz." Also in the foursome: two bankers. The turtles by now are dry, all four-five of them — your turtles, the ones you forgot to water. Sand, you 'll need plenty for the tank, but the bunker is nothing but Minute Rice. Okay, quick, improvise — these reptiles are desiccated. Rice, check, water, check, and for the tank itself: album covers. Two Tenors by John Coltrane & Hank Mobley (extremely out of print) and three pre-Apple Beatle sleeves. "An LP's as good as

glass ...on the course" — an old PGA saying. Saved! Back to health, they swim up a storm, but geez these bastards are hungry. Worms, where's a worm? Greens without worms, what's the world coming to? ' 'Putt, goddammit, when you gonna putt?" — a banker imitating Gregory. 'If you won't putt with a putter, use my driver.' Hands you instead a six-wood, the so-called "comedy club," beat to within an inch of its life but containing a WORM. The punch line — voila! Golf is but a dream ...

DATELINE:

SQUARESVILLE – It's around Xmas, and parties, well, parties are not what I'm after. I'd rather watch mold grow. I'd rather do the frigging laundry, but I've got this gal, see, who drags me to a screaming *motherhumper* of a gathering at which non-retarded children — and interested adults — are induced to sing *happy birthday to Jesus*. I'm thoroughly revolted — what's this earth coming to? — and only by sheer force of will do I avoid puking right in my eggnog. That accomplished, I empty my glass, launch into a chorus of "How old are you now?" and am ssss'd down royally. By staring at my shoes, speaking to no one, and swallowing everything liquid that isn't Pepsi, I survive the event with little more than a major-league hangover and serious ruptures in my boy-girl relationship.

"Wasn't that *lovely*?" she whispers, all aglow (" ... 'neath the mistletoe"), my longstanding, longsuffering relational other.

"Urn ... you mean escaping with our lives?"

"No, silly, the party. Didn't you find it extremely warm and beautiful?"

"Huh, whuh — all that *lowlife*? The seersucker, the tweed? I was surprised how few gold chains — they must've left 'em home as tree ornaments."

"Y'know sometimes you don't understand *anything*. What those people were was *normal*."

"... ?!?!"

"I wish you could appreciate the things in life like they do."

"What, read the stock pages, play golf?"

"I'm not talking about golf." "What then, stocks? Bonds?"

"I really wish you'd grow up." "Oh, and play golf?"

"It's got nothing to do with golf!" "Yes it does. That's the *heart* of it."

"So play golf then. If you're so fixated on it, play."

"I don't *wanna* play golf. Why should I play golf?"

"I need to find someone who's not such a baby."

"Okay, I'll play."

"Suit yourself."

I MUST PLAY GOLF

I MUST PLAY GOLF

I MUST PLAY GOLF

I MUST PLAY GOLF

I MUST ...

Just for research.

DOES GOLF REQUIRE A JOCK? We'll soon see.

In golf as in the broiling of duck, thought might as well proceed action. Some preliminary theories:

1. Golf = bowling without beer. Light recreation. Sociable bozos. Easier to cheat than with pins.
2. 'S a prechoreographed, predigested, 18-hole version of God-bless-America, er, America-the-beautiful. Various terrains in e- z-dose form, landscaped and preternaturally green.

3. An aerobic picnic. Out-of- doors w/ forcible token exercise. In a mere public park, without the next foursome to bust your hump, you could go from sun to sun without actually standing up.
4. Miniature golf — long version. But without the windmills or noisy, whiny brats.
5. Condohood made flesh. With less dehydration — and fewer coronaries — than in same qua tennis.
6. Skin cancer w/out tennis.
7. Standing board rm. w/ skin cancer and sweat.
8. The sporting equivalent of, oh, let's say opera. Something for r * i * c * h folks to embrace, for the sake of embracing, in gaudy excess of any and all direct existential oompah. Some biz about "symbol," "conspicuous etc.," etc. Or maybe green is simply the color of \$\$\$.
9. [The vile, much-discredited "ageist hypothesis."] Fun/frolic/merriment for seniors who hate scaling fish. Or are tired of shuffleboard, bocci, and Chinese checkers. Or have lost their license, still care to drive, and are too fragile for bumper cars.
10. Day-glo Republican m.

Fore!

For the listener, who listens in the snow.

And, nothing himself, beholds Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

— Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man"

IS IT GOLF YET? – Okay, I've played. I'm back from the links, 18 rough, tough 'n' torrid holes, 36 in two days, and I'm certainly, well, whatever I am I have still got my WITS about me. There's a good chance I'm "tired" if that's the word, fatigued, spent, possibly even footsore, but at this hour — after 8:00 — tired/etc. is often what I am. Just from having, y'know, been up so long. From having already done a whole dang day's worth of *things*.

Golf, that thing among things, has hardly. I'm quite sure, made me tired er. Nor, better yet, has it kilt me. I'm alive, as alive as I gen'rally am at let's say 8:20, my sweat- soaked garments a-glued to a bod which lies seated (reclined?) on a bed with the teevee soundlessly blasting.

Something has been on for 15–20 minutes. Something insistently *green*. Something about the something, perhaps merely the green, eventually stirs me.

Did I turn this on? *This*? What channel??

Um,

hmm ... guesswork ESPN. Sports ... green ...*not* baseball... which must mean ... golf, the tape of a tournament. Or the hype for a tournament. Has the green been continuous? Can't be certain but yeah, I think, a tournament. The Pascawawahooly Open, or perhaps the Darren McGavin Baja Classic.

Groovy. I probably WATCH it every fifth of a century. Last thing I saw was the '65 Masters. Arnie Palmer won, or maybe Nicklaus. Somebody. Am I due? Overdue? If I wasn't so beat I would get up & turn up the volume or change it.

Summoning my strength, I pull off a sock, I pull off a pants, I scratch my itchy eyes, I scratch my itchy head, I cancel my scratching and *bing*-go! What I am viewing, it SUDDENLY DAWNS on me, is naught but the televised version, the televised *professional* version, of THAT WHICH I HAVE PLAYED, endured, not once but twice, as recent as my last dozen urinations: a full entire round on each of two days, consec. The v. same game!!!

— Look, hey, c'mon, this is a *golf* piece: let's get casual. If you won't willingly suspend disbelief, I can understand. But — truly, verily — it had not occurred to me, nohow, until that moment. I *hadn't* made the connection until just then. It's like, well, you're on LSD, you turn off the light and it doesn't go off. You manipulate the *switch* and it's still on. But maybe, somehow, you turned it *more* on, *not* less off. Maybe, y'know, maybe maybe maybe...

— Or remember the *Amos 'n' Andy* episode, the one with the narrow house? Kingfish buys a property, cheap, with a front door, a front wall, a stoop, and *much* general frontness. When he walks through, however, it seems to lack a certain depth. Likely it is *only* a front, though perhaps he has merely walked too quickly. (Slow down and we shall see.) It is POSSIBLE, by the same token, that I somehow did not play *that* golf... that there is, somewhere, *another* golf... a pluralistic golf universe.

Sponsored

I wouldn't bet on it.

I have fucksurely PLAYED golf, yet golf (as form; as content) has eluded me. What has kept me from KNOWING I've played golf, it would appear, is *golf*. Between me and golf: golf. Between golf and golf: golf. Between me and me: me. That's two out of three. What's a normal guy to do?

Blame it on the Bossa Nova.

— Eydie Gorme

Gimme my memory cap. Datums and data. I'll sort this out.

Well, first, the holes weren't torrid. I was lying. First day wasn't tiring at all.

18 holes, twice around Spindrift Pitch & Putt, adjacent to the La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club (Members Only), the sometime digs of Jackie O and Diana Ross; Philip Marlowe might've once got laid there; I could prob'ly have gone 27.

A buncha par 3's. Short. On the first hole I took an 11. After that I stopped counting except around the 8th I think it was, and again at possibly the 14th, I shot only one over par, two single-bogey 4's, which in each case I followed with an immediate 9 or a 10. I just couldn't imagine it *matter*ing to shoot so well twice in a row. (So I just said fuggit.) My average hole for the afternoon was probably a 6 or a 7. Let's say 6.5. Somewhere like a 117 total, or 63 over par.

Which is not counting all the "whiffs" — misses — or, worse, whatever you call it when you miss the ball, impact with turf, and the clubhead just stays there, vibrates ... ka-*thunk*! No divot 'cause the swing's got no follow-through.

But I lost no balls — no brush to lose 'em in. A benign, "pretty," open-airy place, salt blowing in from the sea. Ocean venue yet I never once caught sand: no traps (a miracle?) to-day. "Golfers responsible for damage to vehicles and homes" — sign on a low perimeter fence — but I dented no vehicles either. Also spoke to no one but a pair of geez — um — a couple of seniors. Oh right, I was alone. Solo. It's so deserted if you get there late, say 4 o'clock, that they won't even shove you in a foursome. Or an x-some.

But these two guys, a twosome, are faster'n me and they catch up, we intersect, somewhere along the back nine. Dr. Olafur Kune — handshakes and names — & his sidekick "Billy." Nice gents, 1.7 times my age (est.), and I let 'em play through after

lending an ear to their golf rap. "It's the pursuit of a Platonic ideal," says Kune, a retired history prof from Kalamazoo, "although I must admit the gap between my capabilities and my goal are ever widening, unfortunately. There are days, however, or shall we say there are still occasionally *holes*, where I come as close to this goal as I could any longer authentically *hope* to come." Well, gee, that's nice.

Billy (a retired doodoohhead): "What *I* hope is they come up with a ball that'll fucking *talk to you*."

Uh, okay.

Then I let 'em play through, by now it's getting late, and these even *older* guys come around to take in the flags and the last hole I finish is flagless. And what else? Well, this other bozo, I could see him where the holes ran parallel, half my age w/ punk shades & hairdo. And that's about it.

TIME PERMITTING, though, or even not, I coulda kept playing. It was physically in my realm. *But why bother?* an inner voice axed me. (I had no reply.)

You take out ol' Number One on maybe 14 or 15 holes a round, so I'd say it's a pretty important golf stick.

— Sam Snead, *The Driver Book*

Maybe for Sam it is; anything's possible. For me, meantime, on the 2nd merry day of my golfing life, I could probably have done as well with a plastic spoon or fork. Or a celery.

The Lomas Santa Fe "Executive" Course, not to be confused with Lomas Santa Fe (non-exec) where Rollsies are parked. Here it's just Caddies. In scenic, prefab Solana Beach, up one of those hilly roads where every side street is a Santa or a Punta or a Cerro. An a.m. start. I rented a full set of cel— er — golf clubs.

I figured I'd need 'em. Unlike at Spindrifft, where all I used, per the lender's suggestion, were a borrowed nine-iron and putter, this joint boasted long-ish par 3's and a couple of 4's. Go ahead, laugh — if you've played, this must sound chickenshit — but it sure was a longgglong day. I was slower than snailshit.

Just before tee time I detected something foreign at the bottom of my golf bag. I jangle it, poke at it, finally I pull out my clubs and turns out's an empty Heineken can

— shooting holes in golf theory #1 (“Bowling w/out beer”) and sending me off to the snack bar for one of my own, make that two (and not empty). Which slowed us some more.

Us: me, Luke, Rudy and Biff. Slight acquaintances, a/k/a the Foursome That Time Forgot. Took us like four hours. The seniors behind us hated our guts.

Scumbags...

On each of the first six, maybe even seven, holes I managed to land in a sand trap. After two or three I was already feeling bad, sad — in the comparison dept. — that I’d failed to take advantage of all the sand at Spindrifft, never got to *know* it or nothin’. ‘Cause this biz here was straight from a pet (or a plant) store: too immaculate, too eye- blazingly WHITE, too finely granulated to ever make it on a beach. And these rakes — you’re supposed to rake it after you’ve stepped in it — made perfect sense: these sands were born (made?) to be raked. Sand that has never run free — my shoes were full of it.

And my balls — no, fortunately, *not* my “nuts,” my “rocks,” my hairy male mammal things — were full of dents, gashes, *fissures*. From topping the sumbitch, slicing, hooking: mis-hits by the number, i.e., number of club, hole after hole after hole. Irons, woods, but especially woods — no distance, no direction, no diff — no matter how much concentration, backswing, or how mighty a whack. I took a 12 (par times 4) at #4 and a 10 (par square plus 1) at N9. And some 8’s.

But *that* kind o’ number, shit, means little or nothing to me. It’s only on account of the foursome that I (scorekeeper) was even counting. Nor was I bothered by Luke’s, Rudy’s or Biffs significantly *lower* scores; nor even by the fact of Biffs having been achieved with right-handed rental clubs (he’s a lefty). Naw, what was pissing me off was parabolas. The consistent *lofts* these other bastards were getting. I couldn’t get my muhfucker off the ground.

So I switched to a sand wedge for everything. Off the tee, from any lie on the fairway, rough, etc. — regardless of distance. Everything but putts.

Which didn’t improve my accuracy, and certainly not my yardage, but for the first time either day I actually got a hint of sky to frame the action. My own personal action. Raising my eyes, chin and neck to follow each brief, feeble arc, I took in eyefuls of exalted supplementary “nature”: well- groomed storebought treetops, killer sun, distant overcast, bugs in flight, feathered friends.

Speaking of which — birds — these old coots behind us would not leave us be. Like we'd take our time putting, i.e., we'd simply putt *normally*, and back at the tee they would stomp and hoot and audibly obnox us into hurryin'. Just so they could line up, drive — 1, 2, 3, 4 — & hop in their fugsucking carts. At the conclusion of one hole, maybe 4 seconds after replacing the flag, I was kneeling alongside the green filling out our scorecard when this impatient geezer ball came bounding past my ear.

So "nature" — *maybe*. But "tranquility," "serenity" — you've gotta be joking. (How do bizpersons do their biztalk with all these cranky, pushy winter-o'-their-years folks around???)

By the 15th I'd hafta say I was tiring. Possibly from toting the clubs. And bored. Possibly from using them. I'd also broken at least a dozen tees and had to panhandle extras to make it through the round.

But make it I did. A survivor.

At the 18th there was this huge muddy fake pond or lake. The damn thing was so formidable that even after rotating my stance 45 degrees, my second shot caught water — caught it like you catch a fish. On the lip. It dribbled in right at the edge, only like a foot down, and I'd seen this on TV (or read it somewhere) and figured why not. To avoid a one-stroke penalty ("go for it" — right?), I yanked off a shoe & sock, rolled up a pants leg, inserted five toes in the slime. Heck, I thought. I'll whack the sucker *outta* there! — w/ my trusty sand wedge! — and pretend, and broadcast, that I actually GIVE A FUCK.



Which is easier said than, well, it took me four whole splashes to realize I was slamming it deeper.

So I snatched it out, play-acted sheepish hurt pride, added the requisite stroke, *carefully* circumnavigated Loch Ness, and finished with my high hole of the day — a slappy-go-lucky 13.

On the whole, however, it is possible I didn't PUTT too wretched. How else to explain a slim, trim 122? Only 66 over par; a mere 30 above average for the rest of the fellas. If I played another 200 years I'm sure I'd start getting things right... though I can't imagine lasting much longer than another 150.

Goof. What's my gaff? The ongoing gulf. 'Tween me and my subject. Gorf — spelled backwards is frog. (Gofe uck yerself)

THE RHYME OR THE REASON — So it's done now, the scrupulous "research." Two days and I've gotten nowhere. No, that's not it. I have gotten to nowhere. It sure as hell took some doing.

Yet still, the chore. To say something. 'Bout golf. Like what izzit?

But I'm fighting it, right? Taking the hard road. Eyeballing the critter a tad too eyefully. *The mind's road to golf, the mind's road to golf...* does the mind *have* a road to golf? Is perhaps an inappropriate strategy.

Maybe I should take a break from posing these questions to golf — I should pose them to golfers.

Let *them* get verbal. Biff?

— not talking

Luke? Rudy?

— likewise

C'mon golfers! Spill it! You w/ the 5-iron: c'mere.

GREG CEELEY, bartender, National City: "What viscerally *appeals* to me about golf is you have no alternative but to approach it from a zen perspective. It's a game I actually only appreciate every other time I play it, rarely twice in a row, but I have this strong feeling that I might *someday* enjoy it — three times out of five, or let's say even four — so I see no reason to cease playing.

"Getting 'good' is not something that particularly interests me, certainly not in terms of anything as corny as par. If I can eventually go a round where I just hit everything straight, all 18 holes, where I stay on the fairway 18 times, where I never have more than two chips per hole, where um, putting I don't really care about... that's all I need to accomplish. If I break 95 in the process, bully for me, but that's really just so much bullshit.

"I mean, look. It's *absurd* to count all those shots, for the numbers to be that high and for the *lowest* high number to be declared 'winner.' It would also be absurd for the highest score to win, *very* absurd, but not — let's say — even twice as absurd as the whole setup to begin with, so in the end you're just gauging between two profoundly enormous absurdities.

"But gamesmanship, wanting to *win*, all this macho stuff, that just doesn't register to me. Y'know like seniors, and this is the *real* reason they play — I mean those that aren't very good — is half the time they get to beat other seniors who are worse, or more past it, than they are. It's this subdued, kid-gloves kind of macho. The equivalent of yuppie touch football.

"Anybody crazy enough to *want* to beat me, as soon as I identify them as that, I immediately *let* them. I'm basically a sharing type of guy; if that's what they want, they can have it. Of course if I can make some great shots on the last three or four holes so they don't win by as *much* ... that way I can at least keep them from gloating.

"Down at its base, at its root, golf is *not* a very social game. You're there with these people, sure, but oftentimes you're by yourself because you hit the ball where nobody else hit it — and that's when you're *luckiest*. I like mid-iron play more than the rest, say a tricky 7-iron shot from under some tree, 'cause when you're driving or putting there's three geeks standing around staring at your asshole.

"It's a really kind of amazing contradiction. You're out there in this vast green expanse, almost nobody per square mile, no *park* is ever quite so empty, not even at

night — yet there's nearly zero privacy! And then the flipside, this dance, all these scattered foursomes operating independently — externally as well as internally — a few hundred yards apart, separated by not much physically but actually by *everything*, independent yet extremely parallel... this weirdly synchronized behavior under the sun. A strange game!

"But the strangest, most arcane *aspect*, I think, is the greens. Well-tended greens are extremely mysterious things. They can break in ways that are just this side of impossible to guess — you'd almost have to go down and *brush* the shit. Which is fortunately above the level of *my* game, thanks!"

And thank you, Greg. Greens. Let's resume the inquiry.

Around Mr. Palomar's house there is a lawn. This is not a place where a lawn should exist naturally: so the lawn is an artificial object, composed from natural objects, namely grasses. The lawn's purpose is to represent nature, and this representation occurs as the substitution, for the nature proper to the area, of a nature in itself natural but artificial for this area. In other words, it costs money.

— Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*

Depends, in fact, on what you even mean by "naturally." If you read Thorstein Veblen, for inst, this renegade turn-of-the-century economist who wrote *Theory of the Leisure Class* and coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption," you'll find this great lawn debunk which actually goes a whole entire pair of half-steps further. Lawn even as nature, says T.V., is a matter of sheep. And cows. They chew, they graze, they're nature's own lawnmowers.

And what they leave behind, dig, what these stupid animules can't quite rip out from the roots was one upon a time — by the Celts — dubbed *lawn*. Like a word to describe what two-year-olds have made of a neat pile of objects (*mess*), or the oxidation product of old abandoned hacksaws in the rain and sun (*rust*). Lawn = what the fucking cows don't want.

So eventually you'd have these manors, see, this is back a millennium or two, and whoever had the most bovines and ovines — and I guess also equines — also had the most, or the most manifestly chewed, lawn. You'd walk by, see all this lawn, and sooner or later it clicks that lawn = wealth. Power. The coding becomes automatic, instantaneous. Time marches on.

Finally some cowless wiseass — there's one in every' crowd — decides fuggit. I've got a scythe, a wife and nine brawny brats, we'll spend a portion of each day (after tilling the heather and spuds) beating this stretch of sheepless, goatless heath into shape, trimming and pruning it into the *luvliest* ersatz lawn y'vever did see ... why even them genu-wine heifer-holders will not know the diff! (Ah! — the dreams dreamers dream ...) And the rest is history.

A world of lawns — love it or leave it.

Me, shit. I'm a weed-lover, I *hate* lawns. I love it *love* it when sun burns them brown — go ahead, crucify me. But putting greens I like, though possibly not for putting so much as for walking. Especially the 18 in Solana Beach: *nice* cushion, spring, bounce, jounce. Very cottony, spongy, pillowy, which is awful if you're talking fresh-baked bread (but this is grass). "Carpety" — in the good sense of the term.

So, anyway, grass, snake, snake bites tail: lawn unto putting green.

A green is a functional lawn. Lawn *with* a function (other than "See — I have cows"). It is ... so that we might putt. Its evenness of stubble, i.e., its lawnhood per se, is so crucial that Rudy even brought this little two-pronged thing-a-whatsis to poke at spots trammelled by the ball (which weighs about as much as a grape). Even after centuries, blades are still sensitive.

And where's this Veblen guy talking, somewhere like Scotland, right, Wales? And ain't Scotland the "cradle of golf"? Well, gollll-leeeeeeeeeee.....



DAVID CROUCH, unemployed guitarmaker, Del Mar: "I don't know about other golfers and their friends, but when me and my golf buddies talk, it's the opposite of fish stories. We're *proud* of our bad game, miserable shots we've made, times we've been incredibly lucky. We never talk about 'ones that got away,' holes we *almost* birdied, or 'Gee, that hole-in-one I got, too bad no one was around.' I'm sure a lot of these rich cocksuckers talk like that, drinking in the clubhouse brings out the liar in them. But to me and my gang, *reality* is the trip.

"I've never understood the option of improving your lie — what kind of horseshit is that? I, and my friends, we've always played off of concrete, up trees, on top of the bathroom, over the fence on the other side of the street, having to shoot over cars. This is how I started. So now, five-six years later, now that I to some extent know how to play, it's like going from walking barefoot on broken glass to walking the same route with a thick, protective — and really *comfortable* — new pair of shoes. Being able to finally limit my game to *grass*. Ha!"

How funny...

HULK HOGAN MEETS ORVILLE MOODY – Spatially unique among playing-field events, golf is the only sport besides professional wrestling with an indicated playing area but essentially *no* out-of-bounds. If you can see it (find it), you can play it. If it lands in a bird's nest, you can climb up, play it. Can and may. A foot deep in water: can and may. A yard deep: ditto. Two yards: may. It bounces into a mob of tournament spectators — here even the bounds of wrestling are exceeded — you play it *there*. It leaves the course, rolls down an open sewer, you can always trade a stroke for better placement — your option. Or you can/may, at least in principle, scramble down the sewer and try chipping the fugger out if it takes all day. Anywhere on the planet, at least for the sake of argument, is a playable lie.

And likewise f'r the MOON. A playable lie. And not only playable: a *possible* lie. The ball could land there. *Could*. Let's say your tee shot caroms high off a phone pole, a power line, and leaves the course from a steep angle — this is Florida you're playing — directly into a flatbed truck bound for Cape Canaveral with a carelessly exposed cargo of astronaut boots.

It lands in this boot, stays in the boot until just before liftoff. An astro-bumpkin, a real hick from the sticks, draws the boot, it's his size, custom-made even, it feels kinda lumpy but fugga. The moon awaits, the goshdarn moon — "It felt sorta like a dried possum turd," he will later declare — but the *moon*, daddy. So he bears the discomfort.

Okay, a couple days, they land, the flugging lunar surface, and he just cannot take it no more. Removes his footwear and — gosh all fishhooks! — a golf ball. Lucky for Squodunk's first man-o-moon he has brought his 3-wood. "Reckoned I'd have some moon rocks to whack at"; he whacks instead at a Top-Flite XL that has traveled a long, long ways from a tee down in Boca Raton.

The point being: the moon is reachable in one. Is. 'S not exactly *likely* but neither, I dunno, is Reagan shooting himself. And having been reached, with a penalty perhaps for the yokel handling it (though at this point who's any longer talking scores?), it becomes the *legitimate* base of operations for continuation of the round, or more specifically, the *hole*.

Well, heck, you're probably gonna tell me it's not the same golfer play — Wait, no, I just didn't write it right. It *was*, come to think of it, could very well've been the

SELSAME S.O.B.! He's out golfing, see, between moon-shot rehearsals, and then by this *skillion*-to-one shot... ain't life funny!!

So surprise surprise, he's surprised of course but he's on in one. He grabs for his club, computes the penalty for improving his moon-lie, takes a GIANT STEP FOR GOLF-KIND and ...

But wait, let's compare BASEBALL — bear with me. The Bambino, the Babe, the fabled "Sultan of Swat," that old metaphoric moon-shooter George Herman Ruth. 1927, September the 30th, Yankee Stadium. 8th inning, one man on base, Tom Zachary the opposing pitcher. Swat — swack! — home run number 60: the "shot heard 'round the world."

Intimations of superhuman potency, of godhood ... of multiglorious space/time/et cetera ... of orbiting mini-spheroids in the void. Great Moments in Bio-Astro-Theologico- Poeti-Physics. Okay, now answer me these:

— Could a "fantasy variant" of the Babe's great shot have *hit the moon*? Hmm ... factor in a fantasy ball, a fantasy bat... trajectory of the angle of the dangle ... temperature at game time ... Babe himself times a trillion and fifty... sure.

— Could #60, by similar bogue reasoning, have *become* the moon, physically replacing the old one?

Uh why not.

Such happy hogwash is, in other words, hogwash-conceivable. But conceive me this (I dare you!): the mighty Babe, 59 notches in his seasonal lumber, coming to the plate — in regulation league play — *on* the moon. Huh ... whuh ... *no way*. There *are* no leagues on the moon! (Such an at-bat would fall under the category of "exhibition" — and thus command no official HR record status.)

Whereas. Whereas! Golf on the moon COULD happen. In USGA- sanctioned play. As long as it's not a lunar tee shot, i.e., as long as you're merely continuing a sequence of play which began on the big blue marble. Of course — bear in mind — the hole you're ostensibly aiming *for* is back on the marble as well.

And the ball, the ball — look at the fucking ball! It's got *craters*, fchrissakes. Golf... the moon. (Which came first???) (And where does MAN fit in?) Geez, it's *eerie*.

FRED BURK, plumbing contractor, Hillcrest: "The two things I like about it are the tool aspect and the mindlessness.

Having these specialized *tools* — more than in any other sport. You wouldn't take eleven fishing rods with you, and you sure don't need eleven baseball bats, or even two gloves. New irons are very nice and shiny. And the mindless part, the fact that it's highly repetitive and you just *do* it — I find it very much like playing cards *not* for money.

Or Monopoly.

"Business is something I never transact on the course, or even after, not with the people I've just played. I have this terrible temper.

I've had it since I was a kid, and a golf course is the last place to try and contain it. I'm the one — like in those cartoons — who wraps his club around a tree after blowing an easy putt. I want a loan from someone, I should take him out and show him *that*? So that, I think, is really a silly myth — golfing and business.

"And that other myth, ha. Republicans. Aside from the fact that moneyed people play more often, that they have *time* to play more often, and moneyed people tend to be Republicans, there's nothing essentially, quote, 'Republican' about golf. In fact, isn't handicapping an equalizer, er, 'Democratic'? It allows people from different golfing castes to play together — so maybe in a sense it *reinforces* the caste system — but it's also a way to play with someone much better than yourself and still be extremely aggressive, without having to actually shoot in the 80's in order to win.

"And speaking of aggressive, you can't ignore the element of pure, basic *aggression*. There's a certain amount of satisfaction in whacking the ball again and again, just beating on this object which is sitting still. In baseball, where the object flies *at* you, how many times a game, excluding batting practice, do you make that good of a contact — three or four, five? And they call it a *club*, right? Even in baseball it's not called a club."

"After we moved up here," Rachel said, "there was one clue to when he was upset, when things had gone particularly badly. He'd go out on the lawn with a bucket of golf balls and take his driver and one after another hit those golf balls into the water."

Robinson sat up. His eyes grew merry. "The golf balls were white," he said.

— Mr. & Mrs. Jackie Robinson, quoted in Roger Kahn's *The Boys of Summer* on the subject of Jackie's response to frustration in his later days with the Brooklyn Dodgers

Everybody likes to whack at things. With your tool, your dick — oboy oboy!
— *whack* it, Jack.

So golf as primal whackin': no problem there. It computes.

It even almost plays at the other end, the hole. It's corny I know — hi, me again, the author — but for this cute li'l "spermlike" ball to enter all these wide 'n' willing ORIFICES — what can I say, it plays. Well, almost. It'd probably play more *interestingly* if they weren't limited exclusively to greens (sand holes! woods holes! tree holes!), but interest ain't the crux of this here "take." Boring, uniform green holes: no real problem.

The part that's tough, though, is everything *between* the whack, the impact of clubface on ball, and that Final drrrrrop down the hole. Even on a hole-in-one you've got two separate metaphors at work, two radically disparate pleasure principles. The psychological urgencies of *none* of the various "inner games" of golf, of the myriad push-pulls which serve as the pillar and post of every hole as dealt, as *lived*, seem remotely capable of unity.

Whacking ... holing. What's between?

Target practice.

Proximity reduction.

Keeping *straight* on the fairway. *Reaching* the green. Coming *near* the hole ... then nearer. At least in bowling you've got an impact — ball on wood — on the target end. And pool you've got two impacts — at least — before the drop (which itself is somewhat impactful). Archery? Darts?

Come on, let's face it. The midgame of golf — the *game* game of golf — is fraught with psychic diffusion. Maybe if you could only combine, urn, let's see, resexualize uh y'know from this end, the other, in terms of, and then try and get urn o.k. well the, dunno. not, or maybe or....

ADDRESS BY KEL KECKLER, VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE UNITED DRUG-FREE
MASTURBATORS OF AMERICA, TO THE COMBINED ASSEMBLED MEMBERSHIPS OF
LOS ANGELES, ORANGE AND SAN DIEGO COUNTIES, HOTEL SAN DIEGO, 2/31/88

Yes! — yippie yay hey! — Congress has *done* it!

Victory is ours, and celebration is for doggone sure in order.

But the last luxury we may allow ourselves, at so crucial a juncture for both
our *organization* — if you'll pardon the pun — and the destiny of the planet, is to
gloat... to sink into the complacency of blah blah etc.

In overriding the President's veto — and thank *God* for those checks and balances —
our legislators have responded to the dire threat of AIDS in sound and efficacious
manner: by granting citizens, tourists, and documented aliens, over age 6, unlimited
access to pornographic materials and stimulation, all media, and the right of
unconcealed beatoff-to-completion in perhaps not all, but certainly most — c'mon,
it's a *start* — public places. No, we didn't get hockey rinks this time around; 'tis a
pity. But what's wrong with basketball, indoor soccer, theme parks, beaches,
airports, synagogues, bike paths, libraries, class-A restaurants, and upholstery
showrooms?

Indeed, how many among us, before this lucky day, have beat our meat with *full legal
impunity* in pipe shops, 24-hour convenience marts, and savings-and-loans? I rest
my case!

Yup, yuh, this day est glorieux. And we of the UDFMA share directly in that glory.
Have we not shown the way since day *one* of the AIDS crisis? We have, far in
advance of the general populace, intercoursed with no one, either in or out of
wedlock, and unlike our poor, unfortunate brethren in HAPPA, the Heroin-Addicted
Pud Pullers of America, it has always been our goal, nay, our solemn duty to rely
exclusively on our *own*, ahem, needles — if you get my drift. It is we the undrugged
pullers and floggers, and of course all the many self-strokers of the vaginal
persuasion in attendance tonight, who have more than pulled, pardonnez-moi, our
weight.

Every kudo in the book is rightly ours, but... there's a *big* but and I'm not talking
buttocks. I'm talking fly in the ointment, well not *that* fly, but by ointment, yes ...
"ointment." Jizz. Spunk. Jism. The male seminal goo.

Ladies, you can stroll out to the powder room if you'd like — or to the lobby to massage your pudding (sorry but current law does not extend to this spacious hall). The remainder of this discourse will be of little interest or relevance to you — it involves merely those of us with peckers.

To wit: it is high time we gents of penis learned to *aim it*. Our emissions. And by we I do mean *our*, as I for one, I hazard, am one of our more egregious offenders. You, me, all of us — correct me if I'm wrong — have tended, in the privacy of our own homes, trailers, or apartments, to be sloppy with our tools. Some might prefer the word "carefree," but it ultimately comes out the same: a yicky, sticky — and potentially quite lethal — slimy mess.

Okay. Let us imagine taking such a show out on the road. We're at the NBA playoffs, or perhaps a Philip Glass concert, taking full advantage of our newly acquired prerogative to slam the salami, whip our wire, play scales on ye old skin flute right in our seats. Fine, dandy, swell, but *c'mon* now ...

Far be it from me to suggest that even one among us might harbor, at this very moment, the deadly HTLV-3 bug in his system. As I have previously stated, it is we the UDFMA who have conspicuously set the preventative pace. But we must *continue* to set the pace, and how, I wonder, will it look if a stray wad of our miracle-of-birth glop should at the end of its arc land with a splash in an unsuspecting someone's 7-Up?

It would be *disastrous* to our cause — to our *common* cause — as free and responsible grewed up human beans.

Lookit. From this moment forth, our every observed ejaculation will count as a concrete *example*. Safe targets must be our byword — and target *practice* must enter our daily routine. It could be a hanky, heck, or a map of New Jersey, but believe me, this is important: it *matters* if we spill it. And I don't mean no Biblical "joke."

From a practical standpoint, you may question where we are to gaze for exemplary guidance. Good question; let's face it logically. Flog spelled backwards is of course golf, a Fine game I'm told (though I've only tried my hand at the miniature variety), and where better than ye old links to seek time-tested touchstones of targethood?

"Floggers never miss the green." "Tee shots aren't pee shots." "Pullers one-putt or they don't putt at all." "And on the 9th hole Onan parred." Bumper stickers in the lobby as you exit. The fate of the world is in our hands.

Gosh. Does that mean golf as psycho-sexual whutsa “excludes women” (from some of the “fun”)? I’ll ask one — one who *plays* — and see.

RAMONA WOOLSEY, hosiery model. La Mesa: “The whole *thing* is phallic — for either sex. Unisex phallic. But specific *girl* sex, okay, let’s start with the grip, curling your fingers tightly around this stiff long rod. I suppose at 17, when I first started playing, there was something about that which was *moderately* kind of a thrill. And the stance, okay, you have to *bend over*, knees not together — although actually not *that* far apart.

“When I was at the age when I was about to sprout bosoms, I sometimes put ping pong balls in my mother’s bra and wore it — but not golf balls. They’re about the same size but golf balls would only have made the cups sag. This was before I ever hit a ball; today I don’t *mind* hitting them. But not as any sort of symbolic S&M type object... in that sense. Gloves, however, golf gloves — mmm, kid leather, it’s very soft — *there* I could imagine getting into the S&M, y’know, aspect. A ‘woman’s leather sport,’ ha.

“What else? Tees. I used to love to take a tee and put it like a fat piece of straw between my teeth, suck it with my tongue, usually the cupped end *out*, the ball end, but not always, that end is nice too. For some reason I’ve stopped doing it. The bag? No way it’s any big *deal*, but the minor thrill in pulling the club out of the bag, pulling the mitt — some people cover them — off the wood. But *covering* the clubs, putting the mitts back, that’s domestic stuff, furniture, housecleaning — forget it.

“Golf balls as ben-wa balls? That’s sick. But really, actually golf is hardly sexual at all. I find male golfers no more, no less adequate as lovers — there’s no added sexual *dimension* — they’re just typical normal, boring guys.”

Which is where we came in.

So how to get out?

More golf? More golf.

Bad weather is not of itself a good reason for discontinuing play.

Note: Leaving the course does not of itself constitute discontinuing play.

— rule 6-8a, *The Rules of Golf 1987*, as approved by the United States Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, Scotland

Well that sure's a load off my mind. It's raining, it's pouring, retirees and pensioners have scattered to the eaves & niches, if not the clubhouse bar, while me and Ramona are out on the course still a-playing. No, not *that* kind o' play — me no Gary Hart! — but don't tell my gal now, y'hear? THANKS, and meantime: at least these oldboys' retreat-from-wet has not of *itself* meant surrender of round. They work hard for their round — especially here.

Here? Well we figured, hey, go exotic, so we hopped in my pickup for H'wood, no, better yet, Burbank where "Johnny" tapes his show.

The De Bell Municipal Course, on the side of a mountain. The Verdugo Mtns. — way up. Coriiing down you could feel your ears pop. A panoramic view of, well, you could see smog looking *down*, but that was before the rains came. The last rain of springtime. W/ thunder.

And I guess thunder means lightning, and lightning plus golf means Lee Trevino, so these of buzzards ran for their lives.

Leaving me and 'Mona alone and drenched on a mountain, a mountain of golf, a mountain of golf and gorges, of gullies and gorges and pesticide. Or was it fertilizer?

There was all this sand, see, at least it seemed like sand, on the greens, fairways, all over. You'd putt, snatch your ball from the cup, and jesus it's picked up *sand*.

Which kinda made sense 'cause wherever you look there are sandbags. Must be for flood control — it snows, you're up high enough so it stays, collects, spring comes, it melts ... that's how you get all these gulches. Erosion. So eventually the bags break, burst, they must break a lot, so much sand ... then this *smell* comes up.

Pee-yew and it ain't wet sand, it's wet plant food. Or wet bug death. Either way, rainsoaked poison. C-c- cancer. In fearing not lightning we have risked the Big "C." Life is life!

And golf is golf. The object is still you've gotta chase balls and smack balls and tap balls and count and walk and carry — in this case, Ramona's dee-luxe set (she

wanted a cart but I was stubborn). Heck, it's enough of a mountainclimb at sea level. And on an actual mountain, ha, counting's cool — it starts reading like a good bowling score — but chase, walk, and carry ... considerably less cool.

And smacking/tapping, *youch*, there it starts bordering on the Sisyphean.

Everything that wasn't hit *perfectly* straight, with picture- perfect range, would either go directly over the mountain, down the side, or if it hit a piece of mountain it would *bounce* down the side. Or land in gullies 20-30-40 feet deep. Even misdirected putts, until the rain slowed them down, were as likely as not to roll to the sea. Or down into — no joke — snake holes. At the first tee there's this sign, "Beware of snakes." I didn't see any. Nor did I see many flags. At least 13 holes were doglegged *around* the mountain.

And this was my first taste, any altitude, of either a par 5 (there were four) or anything approaching a regulation-size course (5595 yards). That's over three miles — not counting zigzags or hill-climb.

My 173, including a 17, two 14's and three 13's (no single-bogeys, only two doubles), put me a cool HUNDRED AND TWO OVER PAR — and I felt it. My entire forearms ached, along with the palms of both hands, bizarre portions of my legs and chest, abdomen, back, neck, (face?), the arches of my feet, "muscles I never knew I had" I was too exhausted to, uh ... well I sent Ramona (and her 98) home to model hose.

But I finally got a handle on the equation: the higher the score, the greater the *exercise*. How can low scores keep you "healthy"? And I wonder how many seniors golf kills a year.

Theory #9: One tough pastime, golf is penance for the Good Life; an ever-escalating invoice for the payment of Dues.

MAY I NEVER PLAY THE @\$%ING GAME AGAIN.

Golf *is* the void.

Still in H'wood, I sleuth out a fairytale country club. The Wilshire C.C. Through gaps in an ivy- covered fence. And atop the fence: razor ribbon. Moderately shielded, by leaf and vine, to reduce the IMAGE of menace. So's not to harm the fairyland LOOK.

At the parking gate: "Warning:Pinkerton's." A dog barks. A doberman.

I peer through a safe snatch of fence, cop an eyeful of quaint little bridges like from off a Chinese willow-ware plate, cute li'l matched flowing waters, classy little bunker rakes — the classiest rakes I have seen. Varieties, many, of non- indigenous flora; of songbirds earning their room, if not board.

On the world's greenest green — the galaxy's — a gentleman putts, misses, recites (as if by rote),

"Oh ...*fudge*,

ohfudgeohfudgeohfudge." Then smiles.

Then a groundskeeper comes up, snarls: "Whatchoo lookin' at? *Scram*." [The much-vaunted "exclusion" experience.)

So I back off, spin, and facing OUTWARD from the border between golf and life I see what 'tis to be seen. Bums slipping handbills under windshields. A dirty-diaper truck. Bag lady on a curbside resting her feet. Surly young bopcat fixing a flat; the jack won't go down. Then this black guy pulls up, an old beat Chevy, "Hey buddy, wouldja help me out?"

I reach in my pocket, some change, but no — he'd just like a signature. Needs his wife's scrawl on some DMV form to get her one of those handicapped parking cards. For the windshield. He's already signed his own — "Phlebitis, man" — and can't fake hers without it looking too similar. She's back in Inglewood. "Won't they check?" I ask. "What the fuck *they* care?"

She's just a cripple." I sign. "Now the date, same handwriting." A job well done.

Now let's all SING! "Life, *life* frames the golf course." 2nd verse: "As it frames many, *many* a void."

GOLF MOVIE HALL OF FAME

1. *Goldfinger*. Sean Connery's putting vs. Gert Frobe's: who will win???

2. *Raging Bull*. Robert De Niro and Cathy Moriarty in mini-links land. They can't find the ball — "I guess the game's over." ("When the music's over, turn out the lights.")

3. *Caddyshack*. Natch.

4. *The Caddy*. Martin & Lewis. Dean sings "That's Amore."

5. *The Joe Louis Story*. Golfing = avoidance of serious training. Metaphor for the decadence that comes with success; for loss of competitive edge.

6. *True Confessions*. De Niro (as golfing priest) loads a full bag of clubs in the trunk of his car.

7. *Once You Kiss a Stranger*. Golf version, if you can believe it, of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*.

8. *Follow the Sun*. Glenn Ford as Ben Hogan. Like a bowl of mashed turnips playing white bread on toast.

9. *Banning*. A feature-length golf *film*? About nothing else? Oh, go on...

10. *Broken Par (Japanese)*. Print lost in the '23 Yokohama quake.

Okay, so what izzit?

If it's me you're asking, and let's say it's Greece, Athens, around 500 B.C., I'd be only too glad to supply you an answer.

As a first trial balloon, *everything* is golf. Nothing is that is not 9 or 18 holes w/ occasional sand and some water. And since this is Greece, the four elements, let's have fire hazards — it's only proper. Anyway, stuffed grape leaves are golf, the eruption of Mount Aetna is golf, the works of Homer are golf, the concept of goodness is golf, tennis is golf ... which, even on a cheap empirical level, would add to such patent lame b.s. as to totally annul my frontline Sophist credential.

Okay, how about *nothing* is golf? In the vernacular, "Golf ain't." It don't exist. So that tournament last week, the Acropolis Open, won by Xenonophon of Samos with an *amazing* 20-decameter putt on the 17th — it might've *been*, but it wasn't golf. Which again, though it might take a week to prove it, seems cheesy, full of holes.

Leaving us only with *golf is golf*. That is, *golf* is golf. And golf is *golf*. My instincts tell me this is the one, and if the poet in me hadn't already lucked into likewise, I'd be whistling "Eureka" in E-sharp minor.

So it *is* golf. Indubitably. Who said explanations had to *entertain*?

Play word association with "madras" and you probably think "preppy," "golf course," "fifties," or any combination thereof. Truth is, madras doesn't *have* to signify loud plaids in violent colors; it refers simply to the lightweight yet surprisingly strong cotton hand-loomed in the villages of southern India.

— ad for 100% cotton "Quiet Madras" shirt in Banana Republic summer '87 catalogue

Not this wordsman. I saw NO madras on the course.

Loud *colors*, sure — available upon request — but no plaids. And no preppies, no fifties.

Spindrift, if you wanna talk decade, might have had a vague *flavor* of the Forties, Lomas Santa Fe the Eighties, De Bell the Sixties, Wilshire Country Club the Twenties (or Thirties).

It just shows to go ya: some people don't know golf *nohow*.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer on Robert Christgau, the Fugs, Moby Grape, the Germs, Joy Division, Jaki Byard, Ernest Tubbs, Gershwin, Lavender Hill Mob, Lester Bangs

Vinyl reckoning

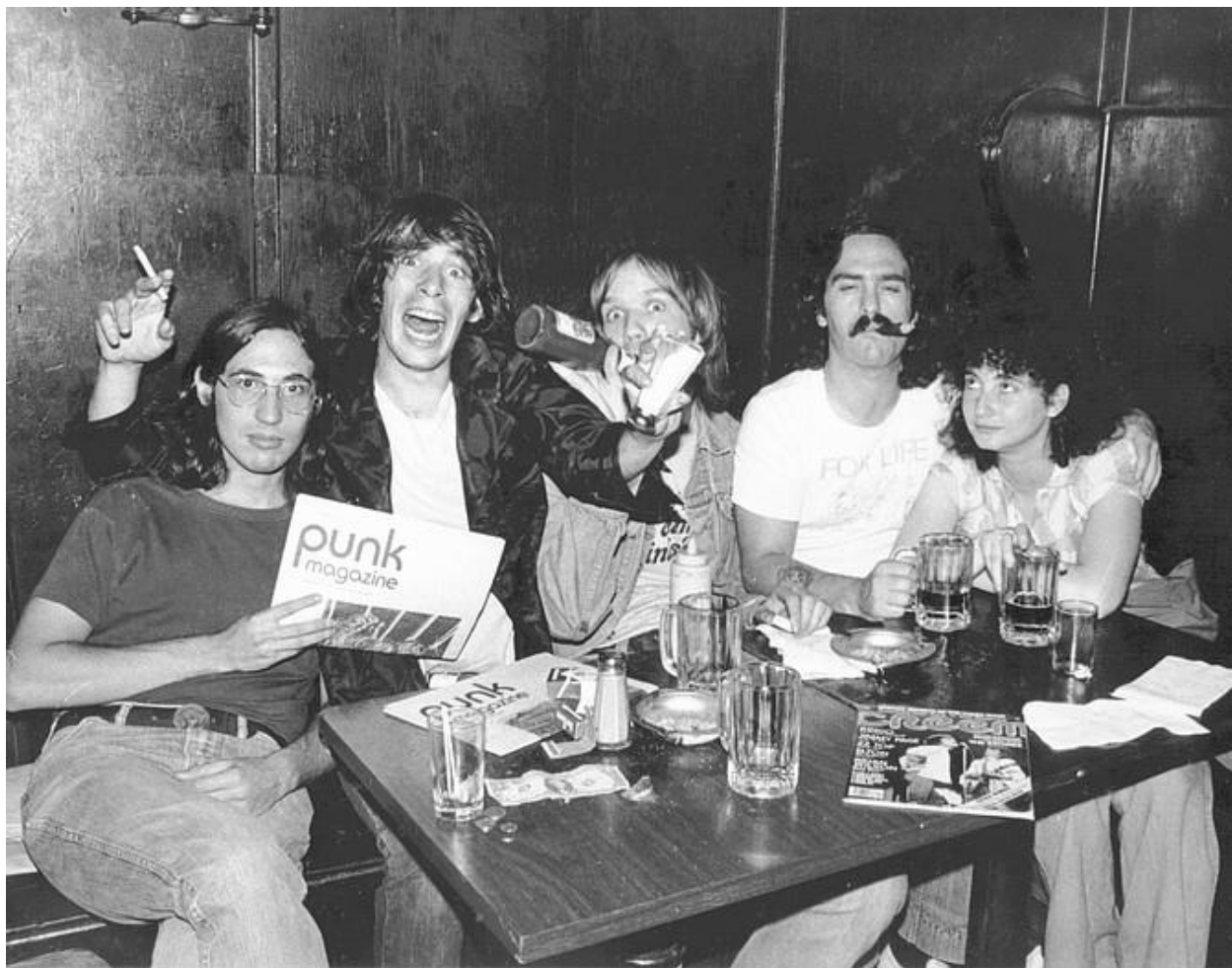
Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Jan. 28, 1999](#)

Cover Stories



Billy Altman, Legs McNeil, John Holstrom, the author, and Rosa Hoffman, 1976. Right now I'm reading *Please Kill Me*, the Legs McNeil/Gillian McCain oral punk thing.

Things we've saved and saved and SAVED. For all the stupid reasons you or I or anybody saves things. You can't take them "with you," not all, not any, but chances are what's left is but a micro-fraction of the total heap of shit that in the course of a life has passed through your prehensile puppy paws. Gone is that copy of Zap Comix number three, and gone is the radium-dial Howdy Doody watch, and the actual puck Frank Mahovlich scored goal number 489 with against Toronto and gone gone GONE are all the silly goddam STAMPS you once fervidly "collected," only a fool would hold onto that shit, and you're no fool, neither am I.


But you've kept the tattered squirrel hanky, right?, that old snotrag your mom hand-painted for your sixth (or was it seventh?) birthday, and the yellow plastic space helmet from 1953, excellent plastic like they don't make anymore—hard, not very flexible, like you think would be brittle, but 'tain't brittle—with a brim like on baseball caps—this is one dizzy helmet! Or if YOU haven't kept 'em, I know I have.

And oh, speaking of plastic: records.

JUST YOUR AVERAGE LA JOLLA MURDER — SEE PAGE 4

SAN DIEGO WEEKLY

Reader



Things we've saved and saved and
SAVED for all the stupid reasons
you've got anybody saves things. You
can't take them "with you," not all,
not any, but chances and
what's left is but a micro-
fraction of the total heap
of shit that in the course
of a life has passed through
your prehensile puppy-gone-Gone
is that copy of *Zap Comix* number
three, and gone is the radium-dial
Honey Doody watch, and the actual
punk Frank Malenka's second gold
number 489 with against Tomorrow
and gone gone GONE are all the
silly goddam STAMPS you once
sneakily "collected," only a kid would
hold onto that shit, and you're no
kid, neither am I.
But you've kept the fattened
squirrel hanky, right?, that odd
noting your mom hand-painted for
your sixth (or was it seventh?)
birthdays, and the yellow plastic
space helmet from 1933,
smallest plastic like they
don't make anymore —
hard, not very flexible, like
you think would be brittle,
but 'tain't brittle — with a beam
like on baseball caps — this is one
dicky believe! — or if YOU haven't
kept 'em, I know I have.

STORIES CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

As they always had previously, the last time I played the eponymously titled *Revolutionary Ensemble* (Inner City 3016), somewhere in the early '80s, the sparrows nesting in the vent above my living room gas heater responded to it. In the notes to that album is a poem about symmetries in music and nature ("The trees joyously wave their branches in rhythm with the wind"), and here was evidence in my own frigging home: birds don't just sing, sometimes they listen. As I was obsessed with cacophonous post-'60s jazz at the time — following the death of punk-rock, it's what I played even to wake up in the morning — it was nice to see the birdies share my preference, and for this particular alb they chirped like banshees. Chirping with, not against — although y'never know...this was four or five homes ago.

Dunno how they'd've felt about *Swift Are the Winds of Life* (Survival SR-112), an earlier recording by the Ensemble's violinist, Leroy Jenkins, with Rashied Ali—I never played it for them. All I know is Justine Carr didn't like it, and neither, not really, did I. Certain installments of Leroy's playing have struck me as shrill and toothy without real bite, neither shark nor bulldog teeth (like you get with Ornette Coleman's fiddling, for inst, or Billy Bang's), at most maybe greyhound teeth—and "romantic" in the annoying sense of hot & bothered yet austere—and this outing was one of them.

In 1976 or '7, to persuade Robert Christgau, my bag-o-wind editor at the *Village Voice*, to let me write about jazz (he considered me a "rock-identified critic"), I did a non-rock "think piece" in which I claimed, among other things, that increasing the aural input of jazz around the house will enliven (for example) your dreams and sex acts. With the latter in mind, just to test the premise with album X, I fucked and ate Justine—my number three or four all-time love object—with a side of *Swift Are the Winds* spinning...which *probably* didn't prolong my tenure. (The piece never ran.)

At the absolute height of my collectional zeal, bloated by too many years on the promo-album dole, my LP stash numbered in the THOUSANDS. Three? Four? Five? I now own, well, hundreds—many, most, almost all of which I never play, probably will never play. True—many or most are scratched, warped, caked with beer, wine and fingerprints. But even among those eminently playable, there isn't that much turntable action. (I also have, oh, at least a thousand CDs—so what's new? My acquisitiveness appears undiminished.)

Thousands down to hundreds—for all the fine and stupid reasons I or you or anyone periodically tosses stuff. Every time it seems like I've hit rock-bottom, nothing left to toss, it turns out there's another item or five to weed out. In any case, it feels

mandatory to regularly check the stack, and rarely if ever is playability, alone, a criterion. (It's far more neurotic than that.)

Hundreds; how 'bout we go for fewer hundreds?

Retaining...tossing...merely FUSSING WITH.

Even with a drastically shortened stack, an unending chore.

In the fall of '66, I embarked on a simple mission: to expand the palette—the text—of philosophy as dealt at American institutes of higher etcetera by slipping massive references to rock-roll psychedelic drugs, pop art, biker films, and other contemporary cultural wigouts into term papers, classroom discussions, and the Q&A's which followed lectures by celebrity academics—a reasonable goal, no? My mistake was in believing such a hoot would play the hallowed dungeons of the grad school at Yale, where the Mayflower fucks who ran the show would've shit in a teacup before letting my atheist-jew contagion defile their ivied walls.

I didn't fare much better with my fellow philosophy students. In the waning weeks before my expulsion became final—already on probation, I could smell it coming—I'd invite these dullards up to my room, offer them pot (they'd decline), and put on some sides. Though I had everything by the Beatles, Stones, Dylan, Byrds, Love, most of the Kinks, the first Doors—it was the spring, by now, before the SUMMER OF LOVE—all they would sit for was "I Feel Like Homemade Shit," on *The Fugs First Album* (ESP 1018). Those who had heard it before would tell newcomers, "listen—here!—he's saying 'shit'!!"—underneath all the mock country harmonies and copious yodeling—then the newbies would grill me, "Is this illegal? Could we all go to jail for this?" What a pack of cheesepuffs!—these jackjills who today teach our kids, or yours (I don't own, excuse me, have any).

In his *Metaphysics*, or was it *Physics*?—'s been so long since I read this crap — Aristotle speaks of four causes, none of which're all that close to how we think of cause these days, something on the order of *that which produces an effect, result, or consequence* — they're more like parameters of responsibility or even (in an old-fashioned legal sense) *liability*. Actually, one isn't too far off: efficient cause, i.e., whatever the hell brings a thing or event into being (for ex.: a maker or parent). He's also got formal cause (the form, shape, structure of the whatsit), final cause (the use or goal it embodies), and the most seemingly no-big-deal of the bunch, material cause (simply its matter).

Apply this bullticky to records, to the recorded music EXPERIENCE, pre CD, and the material component—grooved, sculpted vinyl—more than holds its own. So supremely vulnerable is this whatzostuff, so susceptible to further onslaughts of form—resculptings, regroovings, smirchings and encrustings—that a whole hot WAD of variations on theme is table-set and served from the getgo:

Stations of sonic show & tell, shown/told...all the skips, sticks, jumps, hisses, crackle-pops which document devotion, confirm get-off..."To love a record is to kill it" (the CD lobby speaking), but love or loathe, it's abuse either way...flat black plastic as "interactive" as Silly Putty (or a slice of pizza)...wear-and-tear as index of both age and youth—the record's age and the object management blunders of YOUR youth...ditches-cum-glitches fractionalizing, obliterating, rendering inaccessible even quasi-original sound, grave-marking its exit from this auditory life...(hey, I once got a used Sun Ra elpee, took it home and found a hole in it, not the spindle hole—a CRATER at the start of one track clear through to the other side)...books, by comparison, don't suffer such wear/tear in finite time, or rather, their wear/tear doesn't normally preclude continued full-bore interaction, doesn't annihilate lines, pages, whole chapters (or render them especially unreadable) even in their DISPOSABILITY, a residuum of sonic potential: records as Frisbees—the adventitious sounds of flight and smackup...

All penultimate to the final outpost of vinyl irony: the unit record, irrespective of its health or welfare. DECOMMISSIONED...freed of sonic obligation...serving no ongoing material function but to give body to a cover and sleeve... silenter than a Cage silence piece...

SOUNDLESS MERE MATTER.

The question is this: Have I saved the LP version of the Germs' (GI) (Slash-SR103) as an "investment" or as the one Los Angeles punk-era thingy I might wanna ogle and caress someday: my designated L.A. Punk keepsake? To make the rent, sure, I'd probably sell it for 50 bucks, no it would hafta be at least 100 — 75? — but for now it's a keeper, even though the CD reissue, Germs (MIA) (Slash/London 422-828 808-2), sounds pretty good, pretty close. Which is something you gotta consider with digitalized analog rock — if you're thinking *replacement* — 'cause all hype to the contrary, CDs do NOT sound better, and rarely anywhere as good. Even recordings not butchered in remix (eat shit, Paul McCartney!) tend to lose more in mere remastering intangibles like "presence" and "warmth," in addition to simple aural data—the forest and the trees) than decades of surface destruction can ever take

away. The fact is: pre-digital rock ALWAYS sounds superior, even with all the destruction factored in — for moments anyway — enough to supply GLIMPSES, at least, of not only *an imaginably better* sonic world, but an actual preexistent one...

Anyway, PUNK as once upon a time actual...more than a metaphor...’79: a verry good year. L.A., a worthless sucktown for just about everything else, has somehow become the locus for probably the vitalest, most interesting assortment of punk groups in the country...a small miracle. Three-four nights a week I went and saw ‘em play and on Saturdays I hosted an all-night FM punk hoot where one week, from the sweaty palm of my guest, *Slash* mag editor Kickboy Face, I received a copy of the first 12-incher pressed by Slash Records. It was also Darby and company’s first (and as it turned out, last): a perfectly executed knee to the groin of life-is-a-gift precept and practice which today, nearly 20 years later, appears to have been the highwater mark of L.A.—Anglo U.S.—make that WORLD punk recording...this is it.

I haven’t let the cover—shiny black w/ the famous Germs blue circle—go to seed, and even the taint of the woman then managing them, my v. worst ex-gal to that point of my life, worst as gal and just as bad as ex, one of the few exes I’ve never jerked off thinking about, whom in the wake of Justine Carr’s ignobling departure I’d on several occasions lain with, has been insufficient to indelibly sully this sacred object.

There’re possessions I’ve housed (if not quite clothed and fed) longer, like I mentioned the space helmet, and once in a great while I’ll stumble into my birth certificate at the bottom of some drawer—though I couldn’t say which drawer it’s currently in—so in a sense that’s the oldest scrap of matter from my own lifetime, the oldest unit of CONTEMPORANEOUS matter, still lying around, as opposed to items whose actuality predates my first breath—boxing cards from the turn of the century, say — boosits acquired more or less as curios, antiques. My skaty-eight hundred boxing magazines, which I began amassing in junior high, are under shoes in the closet, in cupboards over the sink, in cartons I haven’t opened (or directly thought about) since 1980.

If that seems a longgg time—like excessive deadtime—I’ve got albums that haven’t kissed stylus SINCE BEFORE KENNEDY—the first-Kennedy!—got shot. Played or perennially un, when something lingers that long, just eyeballing the damn thing outta be good (if it’s good for anything) for triggering the occasional ancient memory. Because music has been so central to my, um, being, records are the only collective heap of stuff I’ve maintained continuous hands-on control of and since

played and un are stacked together—what would be the point of not?—a goodly percentage of even the uns have been, and remain, the material and efficient cause of towering mountains—avalanches—gravel pits—of recollective blah blah blooey.

They would seem in some cases the only dependable, the only *conceivable* general faces of such biz (certainly not letters, photos, books, toys or nasty license plates). Not much otherwise, short of dreams, happenstance, or the memory bank itself spitting out interest I wasn't expecting nohow, could serve as so efficient a provoker.

Reminder. Prompt, Intimater. Mnemonicon.

Cipher.

Axis: Bold as Love (Reprise RS 6281). I peck and it says to me, smiling, *Ah, shit, man*. Nice artwork. I'll admit it's nice artwork: Hendrix as a Hindu god with many arms, surrounded by cobras and elephants and little Keystone Kop types with angry demons on their tongues. But not so terrific an album—his second—a big letdown after he first. Didja know I did the first American feature on Jimi Hendrix? For *Crawdaddy!* (*Rolling Stone* didn't exist yet), which I'd started writing for while at Yale, but which a year-plus later still didn't pay anything. Yes: having by then INVENTED rock criticism as we know it, I sought not only recognition but a mess of potage...a couple of bucks.

Out of academia almost a year, I had no job but was writing lyrics for, and sometimes living with, the Soft White Underbelly, a not-bad psychedelic combo who would eventually surface as the 2nd-rate pseudo-metal (though some would say *metal*) Blue Oyster Cult. Don the guitarist had a girlfriend named either Cindy or Debby who behind her back everybody called Ah Shit Man (rarely did she go ten words without saying it). A fond mem'ry, the time I went to piss and there she was on the floor, naked, hugging the toilet, trying to vomit—she was on mescaline. She turned her head just enough to recognize me—"Oh, hi," then "Ah, shit, man, I sure do love Donald." Three days later, they split. She had a great ass.

It turned out her father was the classical editor for the Sunday N.Y. Times, possibly music editor overall, this guy who'd been there 20 years. She set it up and we met at his office—grey hair, grey tie, immaculate, polite, an upper-middleclass square, a CUBE, who'd probably seen Tosca and Tannhauser 13 times each; I think I was wearing purple bell-bottoms, hair as long as, oh, George Harrison's. We shook hands,

exchanged nothings; yes he knew who Hendrix was. Was anyone scheduled to review *Axis*? (Back then, before they realized the killing to be made in record ads, newspapers ran the occasional rock review—it wasn't compulsory.) Nobody was, but he wouldn't assign it, it would have to be on spec. No kill fee. Whudde I know, I'm 22, a dumbass neophyte, I buy the record, play it a week, never quite get "into" it, but write the fucker anyway, waxing arcane for 300, 400 words which of course they pass on...like shit, man.

Before a set by his quartet at the Village Vanguard, summer of 1970, Ornette Coleman declared: "Music is a way of remembering." It probably is—but how so?

Once, in '73, '74, when my stereo was on the blink for three months, my inability to scare up a soundtrack to my life, especially with all the modules of soundtrack heaped all around—my burgeoning stack—was tangling me in knots. When I finally got it working, the first thing I played (Moby Grape's first album) affected me so deeply I cried: dig: music COUPLED WITH the instant recall of its healing/nurturing/bliss-o-genic payoff...the whole damn ear-to-heart trip, as ever...ear-to-head-to-heart ...ear-direct-to-body...music as both accompaniment for the memory of its own eternal etc. and a ritual releasing---into the room, back into your blood—of something already internalized, absorbed, at a level deeper than the cell...internal/external/eternal...an often shattering experience. Or some such. (But how so?)

Likewise, what's it, the contrary?—the converse?—the corollary?—should be equally true: REMEMBERING IS MUSIC.

When the cops arrived, the live version of "Means to an End" was spinning on the turntable, which I'd reconnected, and the footprint made for odd little chitters more like wheezes than pops or clicks. Don't know why I bothered calling them—they were such abusive shits—it wasn't "cost effective," they said, to waste their time on so meager a burglary; they bummed me worse that the burgle itself, which I'd walked in on, but less than Kathleen's betrayal. As I was entering my apartment this wide muther was standing there about to walk out. Dropping my equipment, he swung the door at me and jumped out the window he'd used to break in. There was hardly any new damage to the turntable, which was already pretty shot, but a big athletic shoeprint graced the disc, which had flopped off in the drop.

Joy Division's *Still* (Factory FACT 40) was one of the last punktime waxings I actually bought, as opposed to scamming a promo of, which would've been tough since I no longer had a radio show, having been tossed for too much on-the-air obscenity (profanity?) (whatever). By the time it came out, Ian Curtis had suicided. The punch line to "Means" — "I put my *trust in you*"—gravely addressed, one assumes, to she over whom he would shortly hang himself — took on special meaning when my current amour wouldn't come over, or even exactly talk to me (except to say she was, well, unavailable...preoccupied), while I was waiting for the fucking cops to show.

Which was indeed to be expected. Kathleen and I had barely been speaking since she caught me, or maybe didn't catch but found out about me fucking so-and-so on the radio station floor, after which we'd split for a couple months, though technically we were again "together." And this time: break in...break up?

Among items taken: TV, cassette player, car keys, binoculars, trench coat — but no records.

(1) Loss of objects. (2) Objects which themselves testify, specify, petrify loss. (Of anything and everything.) Losing the latter equals loss of loss? No, you dope: *double* the loss.

Loss of the past—that's given—but throw in loss of sightlines to the past, to the interconnections of things past, to causalities (both mighty and mighty slim) governing present predicaments...that smarts.

"ACCEPT LOSS FOREVER"—Jack Kerouac said that. Re both life/lived and its moldy oldy souvenirs. (Take out the trash.)

Between now and the grave: increments of loss. Okay, but is it like sand in the hourglass simply drip dropping away, a haphazard real-time (regularly irregular time) "letting go"—or the goosestep of effective (too effective) potty training to the last bittersweet gasp of rudely and crudely allotted time?

Bitter sweat.

Back to Justine: her '77 abortion.

Everything was fallin' apart, fallin' apart...dwinking, dwinking: dwunk!...biggest lush I'd ever known and/or loved. She wrecked my car and was bit by bit wrecking my life, yet I woulda done 'most anything to keep her around. Including: give up my own drinking ("set an example"); have a baby with her (a prospect she often raved about)—two things that ran violently against my grain, 'specially babying. When she got pregnant (drunk, she could never get her cycle right), a golden opp presented itself, but her choice was to terminate. Femmes fatales are nothing if not capricious.

I dropped her off at the clinic, then hit a record store and browsed the used bins. When I picked her up, she was a bit shaky but said she was starving, so I took her for steaks and, when she couldn't finish, ate both myself. Everything was cordial enough till we got to my place, where, wary of exposure to microbes so soon after surgery, she refused to sleep in the same bed with me, insisting I was "coming down with something"—I sounded congested from all the meat—so I dragged the couch a discreet distance from the bed and occupied it.

For our sleepytime kicks, I put on the day's purchase, pianist Jaki Byard's *Freedom Together!* (Prestige PR 7463), which I immediately felt pleased about having got—first album by Jaki as leader that measured up to those he did backing Eric Dolphy. I hadn't cared for a couple of others, but lying on the couch I didn't mind this one, and we both really dug Jr. Parker's vocal on "Getting to Know You" (at a moment—no irony—where we knew each other too well), though when I play it today it sounds like the mannered labor of a 50th-poercentile '40s big-band singer, a few pegs up from Earl Coleman, yeah, but a few down from Johnny Hartman just as sure—and I don't think it's my retro view of the day-o-purchase which alone drives the rating so low.

In any event, there was no drinking that night. And not the faintest threat of sex of any sort—then or ever—as they'd told her to abstain for two, or was it three, weeks (could the romance last that long?).

So take out the trash.

Kokomo, *Asia Minor*, (Felsted FS 17513). Bought for 99 cents, brand new, at Billy Blake's, Smithtown, Long Island, 1962 or '63. Possibly my first cutout LP.

Title cut ("based on Grieg's Piano Concerto") made the top 40 in 1960 or so. Other cuts are lifted from Chopin, Bizet, Liszt, etc.: synthetically hopped up transcriptions of the classics for "rockin': piano w/ strings.

No photo. "For personal reasons, Kokomo dislikes being photographed. Being eccentric and very moody, if his recording brings him sufficient fame and fortune, he is likely to desert it all for some far off island such as Majorca...and spend his time in the simplicities of life." Which led me to believe "he" was in reality a piano roll.

Saved solely for bathetic purposes.

Acceptable loss...memory of loss...loss of memory. Of the faculty of memory.
"Memory chops."

(Select one)

(1) *The Persistence of Memory*, a painting by Dali. I don't remember it. How it looked. Just the name.

(2) Dali's *Persistence of Memory* is a truly (truly) shitty painting. Yet I remember once liking it.

If there is a "Rosebud" to my collection, Ray Charles/*Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* (ABC-Paramount ABC 410) may be it.

Sponsored

The first time I heard "I Can't Stop Loving You" — wait a sec, we could look up the date. It was on the radio when I got home from watching Benny "Kid" Paret get killed by Emile Griffith, well, he didn't die for 10 days, but the fight took place March 24, 1962 — Griffith knocked him out in the 12th and he never got up. I was in high school, it was the first boxing I saw live, and a few weeks later I bought my first LP, the one from which "Can't Stop" was taken.

Which in its own way transformed family life as much as the Elvis "Hound Dog"/"Don't Be Cruel" single, which six years earlier had given me the upper hand vis-à-vis my Parents and their Bing Crosby and *South Pacific* 78s. Rock-roll singles went a long way towards offsetting the musical squalor chez Melz, but having the

means to command 20 minutes of turntable time—consecutive—ultimately proved a lot more EMPOWERING than unit bursts of 2 ½ to 3. Thank you, Ray.

Empowerment...musical wisdom...not to mention: one of my most applicable all-time musical conceits: the Unknown Tongue (see pp. 113-127 of *The Aesthetics of Rock*).

After *Modern Sounds* I got *Genius Hits the Road* and a couple more ABC-Paramounts, then moved on to his earlier albs on Atlantic, which along-side goodies familiar from the radio—"Yes Indeed!," "Swanee River Rock"—featured some archetypal outpours of the blues, real hardcore blues, not just blues-y: the tension-release, catharsis/transcendence, headlong dives into the abyss, the whole torrential gamut of FEELING, intensity as musical form, the technology of grief reduction, of its transformation to joy—umpteen varieties, As a bonus, Atlantic inner sleeves then had these neat little repros of album covers from other acts in the stable—the best artwork of the era—the lure of which led me instantly, inexorably onwards to JAZZ: Ornette, Coltrane, Mingus, Monk with Art Blakey, Lennie Tristano.

Plus those sunglasses with the wide black plastic frame: "Genius shades." My freshman year of college, I wore them at night—to those in the know, they signified abandon. (Just as Ray's music still lingeringly defined hip for a certain sub-class of white teenagers only a tad or three behind things.)

The problem is, I haven't been able to STAND the ABC stuff since I weaned myself off it in favor of the blues, no later than fall-winter of '62. Play it now and the tempos feel slow as molasses, the string arrangements gloppy as raspberry mouthwash, and the omnipresent whitebread chorus...keep it.

Sequence is critical.

Did the Kinks release *Arthur* between *Village Green* and *Lola*, or was it before *Village Green*? I can't remember, that is I have no clarity about it, and didn't possess a reference work that could be consulted on such an ish. (If I had all three albums, which I don't anymore, even though this was before they listed release dates, catalog numbers would tell us in a second.) Every time any kind of rock source book has happened my way I've quickly chucked it, figuring my recollective muscle—especially regarding the late '60s—would always get me through: wrong!

Does it trouble me that I've forgotten (and have no backup to help me fake it), making me less of an "authority"?

NO NOT AT ALL. (He asserted.)

Then one of those classic dead ends (and I don't mean classical): *Rhapsody in Blue/An American in Paris*, Hamburg Pro Musica Orchestra, conducted by George Byrd (Forum F 9044).

Through my freshman year, jazz, Ray, and his hits-o-the-day—"Big Girls Don't Cry," "Do You Love Me?"—were in competition with lotsa hokey hogwash in the dormitory ether: Doris Day, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, barbershop quartets, Enoch Light and His Light Brigade, Sergio Franchi, the soundtrack from *Mr. Lucky*. Somehow nobody had classical, but in its place: plenty o' what wouldja callit, classy?—or just "grownup" (for our ever "maturing" taste)? Simulations of adulthood: a dead-end street of the heart-mind-body-soul if ever there wuz one.

My personal contribution to this socio-sonic miasma was a 69-cent Gershwin LP, so shabby the cover was coming apart, which I played the heck out of for at most a week, by which time I was bored silly — sick of it — 's kinda lightweight, eh? — for this and ALL possible lifetimes. As to what it meant to me, y'know for as long as I could bear to have it on, dunno f'r sure what the phenomenology of the deal mighta been — how & why it hit me — but I'll speculate: a dose of jazziness if not jazz (could the clarinet solo in *Rhapsody* have briefly impressed me?), a dose of "night music" a la *Mr. Lucky* — those two things meeting AHRT on a pedestal just as I was beginning to check out cubism, futurism, and so forth — a nascent curiosity 'bout things Euro — while entertaining very dumb "theories" on this & that (an ahrtist myself, I conjured up bogue genres with names like "mono-cubism" and "statio-kineticism": what a dipshit). I wouldn't listen in earnest, or at all, howev, to actual high-booty Euro *music* — classical per se — till 1993, at no time since which have I played (or considered playing) this alb. When I hear this pap in Woody Allen movies, I wince.

So how come I continue to keep such bosh? I keep it as a souvenir of non-redemptive folly; as not only kitsch — contentwise — per se, but the kitsch of youth it-self per se, or let's call it late adolescence. But most of all I keep it for the groovy liner notes:

"George Byrd, the celebrated coloured American conductor renowned for his interpretations of the music of George Gershwin...in 1947 formed in Harlem his own orchestra...consisting of approximately fifty per cent each of white and coloured people"...wow, coloured!

Sentimental surplus value.

From the Radio Ranch...

Ernest Tubbs Greatest Hits (Decca DL7-5006). Early 1980; a good three years since I'd been even semi-earnest about country music — *ancient* sounds in county/western — which in the backwash of punk seemed an even goofier joke than mainstream rock. On the cover, Ernest in his big white Stetson flashes the world's biggest, and fourth or fifth phoniest, smile, but my hunch at the time was he'd complement whatever music X were likely to bring along. Every week, after the first hour, musicians would show up and I'd spin anything they handed me, which in John Doe's case turned out to be Al Green and Jimmie Rodgers. And sure enough, when I played "Waltz Across Texas," he and Exene got up and waltzed around the booth: a touching moment (when in marital sync, they were very impressive).

The Beatles/1967-1970 (Capitol SKBO 3404), The double album with the blue cover, one of but two Beatles releases I got as promos, and the only one later than the White Album that I still own — and only for one cut: "Across the Universe." (I never bought the loathsome Let It Be, on which it originally appeared, so this was my one lucky shot at it.) By the ass end of '80 — the week John Lennon died in New York — It was a dozen years since the Beatles had in any way been musically viable, so the news he was dead didn't immediately distress me, especially since I and my friends in L.A. were in deep-shit mourning for Darby Crash, who had overdosed (intentionally) a couple days previous. Tears for Johnny took me a few days to activate, and amounted to little more than a short gush for my own younger days, but Darby's musicmaking was present-tense all the way, and his death for many of us was sheer misery—revealing (as if we hadn't known) the essence and pigment of local frontline punk: not anarchy but terrible unhappiness.

The Saturday after both deaths, this kid named Bosco whom Darby had been in love with, but who was too straight to reciprocate, arrived at my show while "Across the Universe" (following the Germs' "We Must Bleed") was spinning. At its conclusion, Bosco announced that it was Darby's favorite Beatle song — (who'd've thunk he was even aware of the Beatles?)—ain't life funny?

Promo albums. Pennies (not even nickels) from corporate food-tube heaven.

The Very Best of Gene McDaniels (United Artists UA-LA447-E), a late-'70s compilation for someone who hadn't had a hit (or much of a miss) since the early '60s, is a singularly unappealing package; the singer against rose/pink/lavender horizontal stripes; no liner notes like U.A. had done with their Fats Domino, Jan & Dean, and even their Ricky Nelson collections. The tunes, while pleasant in a pre-British Invasion pop sort of way, are hardly even middleweight (welterweight?); the vocals, a whiff-and-a-half too clean in their articulation.

What keeps me hanging onto it is during my sophomore year I had a jazz show on the campus station, knew my way around dials, and somebody got the bright idea to preempt regular programming and let me do commentary 'tween rounds of the first Sonny Liston-Cassius Clay fight — he wasn't Ali just yet — pirating the blow-by-blow signal from the national broadcast, delivered locally by WABC. (A station unafraid of risking FCC wrath, we had a range about as far as the parking lot.)

I said things like "Hey, that was some hook," but anyway, before their fight coverage began, the last thing ABC played was "A Hundred Pounds of Clay," McDaniels' two-year old hit—nobody gave Clay much chance of winning. If you've never heard it, and it can't still be in oldies rotation, 's about God creating gendered woman (weighing in at one-oh-oh) and the upshot for gendered man...oh, how—what's word?—catchy.

Some year I'll take off the shrinkwrap and play it.

No, that's a lie—actually, I do have a rock book or two. Though maybe not the kind that'll do us factually any good. Right now I'm reading *Please Kill Me*, the Leggs McNeil/Gillian McCain oral punk thing, where on p. 159 someone nebtuibs the Academy of Music show, New Year's Eve '73—well, I was there, wasn't I? The list of bands seems wrong—New York Dolls, Kiss, the Stooges. No: the Stooges did play, and Kiss opened (billed fourth, behind Teenage Lust, and nobody knew them, they got booed off the stage), but Blue Oyster Cult headlined, and the Dolls weren't on the bill.

But lemme really be sure about this — was I there? Was it that year or '74? Thinking...thinking...hmm...GOT IT: '75 was my last year living in New York, so '74 was the New Year's Eve I wanted to be dead and went to a party hoping somebody had a gun I could use. Some things I would remember if you cut away two thirds of my

brain: it was the LAST SHOW I saw the BOC do before I realized they were cheating me. Or maybe I'm all wet; maybe 2.5 thirds are already gone.

That's what "rock history" is: collective bad memory.

Remembrances of dope days past: Hums of the Lovin' Spoonful (Kama Sutra KLPS-8054), Jefferson Airplane, *Surrealistic Pillow* (RCA LSP-3766).

On a grey, grim weekday in the final stretch of my crawl to the finish at Yale, my pot stash exhausted, knowing no dealer any closer than Brooklyn, I downed almost a full tin of nutmeg — pirates did it, right? — perchance to get looped. Nothing happened at first, so I ingest more (bitter!) more (vile!), till in two-three hours: *bingo*. High as a blimp, I wandered the streets of New Haven, reading the minds of passersby, stumbling over subatomic sidewalk particles. Although I wasn't hungry, it occurred to me that I should eat, so I got a sandwich and fries at a George & Harry's, only to discover that I couldn't taste a thing. This was somewhat unnerving, so to test my "bility to perceive *anything* ('fore chucking it all, throwing in the epistemological towel, and accepting the "flow"), I went to the juke and selected "Full measure," a single off the third Lovin' Spoonful album. The summer before, stoned on hash, I'd thought "It's All Over Now" by the Rolling Stones, a song which couldn't've been more familiar to me, was actually being sung by Ray Stevens —that's how I *heard* it — but this sounded like nothing. And I don't mean it sounded "unlike anything else" — unusual, unique — I mean like NOTHING.

One of a handful of groups to submit whole-hog to the trans-idiomatic shuck known as folk-rock, the Spoonful in retrospect lacked the balls, the rigor, or the mischief to parent as provocative a folk-fringe hybrid as the Holy Modal Rounders (or for that matter the Fugs), opting for a music devoid of danger or true sass. Somewhere that spring, to work their way out of a bust, they ratted out their pot connection, an act of heinous careerism (oh they were *worried* Zal the guitarist, a Canadian, might lose his work permit) that effectively (and ironically) ended their run as credentialed proponents of contempo-oogabooga.

Back at my room, I cast my fate to the Airplane. I had both of their albums and hadn't got much out of the first, except a sense that they were kinda what — *post-folk-rock*? (Or something.) The second, which in short order would play a foreground role in sonically redefining the late '60s — the Psychedelic Era qua music — I hadn't yet listened to. First spin, soon as I put the needle down, huge ugly blotches of dark green algae spring up *everywhere*. Needle up, they vanished.

Noticing a track called “My Best Friend” and feeling gee, I could use a friend, wondering if in fact these folks whose sounds I barely knew could be *surrogate* friends like the Beatles had for so long seemed (wouldn’t THAT be nice?), I tried again — whoops — more algae.

Dying for some human contact—music wurn’t contact enough—I ended up at the Yale Library, a stone-cold old stone repository of the pompous and dead, laughing uncontrollably. People glared at me (though no one had the pep to shut me up), and then suddenly, whoopee! A FOX HUNT—redcoats on horses jumping over tree stump—I’m not making this up—the most vivid hallucination of my life.

New fugging Haven: where George Bush and William Buckley (Oliver Stone and Jodie Foster) learned HOW.

The last time I thought about it, my favorite philosopher was Heraclitus. “You can’t step in the same river twice”—I’m sure you know that one. “The way up and the way down are one and the same.” A bunch of fragments, aphorisms, “Nature loves to hide.” One that I’ve always got a kick out of, and a shitload of writerly mileage from, is “Consult thyself,” translated also as “I consulted myself.” I don’t know Greek, it’s oke either way, but meaning what: “Empiricism starts here”? Spotlight on the subject (before Western philosophy even *had* a subject-object split)?

In the intro to *Rock She Wrote*, a 1995 collection of female-authored rockcrit, Evelyn McDonnell argues that, hey, it’s COOL that women acknowledge their subjectivity. She concedes that some gendered males have also walked this path, “not just in the gonzo, macho style (Lester Bangs, Richard Meltzer)” — hey, that’s *me* — “but with heart-baring sensitivity (Bangs, Tom Smucker).” Gosh — I must be part of gonzo (whatever th’fuck it is—I’ve never known!) (even as sound, the word makes me gag). Lester threw away.

Way back at the dawn of the ‘70s, Robert (“Bob”) Christgau, whom I’ve already griped about, a bust-ass (and I don’t mean kick-ass) editor who later pulled rank on Lester by advising him that he’s graduated Dartmouth (while Lester’d graduated nuthin’), actually voiced a not-so-begrudging respect for *Rolling Stone*, a truly horrible sheet I occasionally wrote for (Bob didn’t) but never EVER read, which he hailed as at least fulfilling our need for “rock journalism:— reportage— “investigative” or otherwise. I now realize what he had in mind was simply topical I news of the “trade,” of a scene writ LARGE (but still of questionable existence) for which he relentlessly shilled, shills, will always shill (when you review *everything*, or pretend

you do, without an eternal guarantor of the “fact” of such supposed mega-reality — even one as lame and noxious as the *Stone* — you would pretty much seem a freakin’ FOOOOOOOOL, eh?). Whenever he spit the notion of journalism at me, I shot back with “Consult yourself,” which he in turn poo-pooed as “bourgeois individualism” or whatev — ‘twasn’t “universal” enough for the bastard...fuck me.

Then as now, on the street as at motherfucking Yale, my fundamental concern was with truth, THE truth (hee haw), i.e., for starters: what you can be surest of. If we’re talking records and bands and what-not, all you c’n be anywhere NEAR sure of is the shadow of this shit in your own playpen. Which is no easy ride — mercy!

To confront and interrogate your merry ass, you’ve gotta be objective, impersonal, you’ve gotta go straight at your own jugular — mix a metaphor — and take furious notes while the blood is still fresh. If the initial calculus ain’t perfect, you’re nowhere, and anywhere you proceed is triple nowhere.

And of course certain fuckheads will ask: Where are you then? — y’know, anyway. They’d say you’re in autobio land. Well, fuggit. If such procedure smacks of diary keeping, if the text thus generated is MERE autobio, so be it. Christgau’s own autobiographical slip, for the record, has been as visible as anybody’s Terror of aging — of the possibility of *appearing* old — has always been a dominant theme. When Chuck Berry’s “My Dingaling” came out, Bob had just turned 30 and was taking it hard. Rather than call Chuck’s first hit in some time what it was — cynical toss-off; play down to a pack of children — he aligned himself with the children an lauded “Dingaling” as evidence of ageless Chuck’s neverending oompah. (“The kids are alright”my dingaling.)

Which Bobbo would certainly never admit, or admit the relevance of (the personal he’d allow to be political — hell, he’d insist on it — or even historical, but that’s just everyone else’s personal: the third person personal). Truck extensively or extendedly with the first-person personal (except briefly for “parable” sake) and you run the risk of having this jerk and his ilk accuse you, as he has me, of “narcissism.” LISTEN GOOD.

What I write, on music or anything, is *not* narcissism—NEVER!—any more than bodybuilding — if you do it *right* — is narcissism. (Sayeth Mr. Schwarzenegger: you’ve gotta *judge* your delts — y’can’t love ‘em!) Nor is it “solipsism” — hey now, I’m talking to you, YOU!, why would I waste my time scribbling this bullcrap for myself? Or masturbation — “self-indulgence” — geez, I’m getting defensive, don’t wanna be defensive, NO MORE DEFENSIVE.

Go ahead. Call me a philosopher/poet, that's OK, or an archaeologist of the real-time micro-moment, even (I'll grant) a phenomenologist, but *please*, I am not now, have never been, and have never had any interest in being a "journalist" (good or bad).

From the night in '70 he was on my radio fandango to somewhere in the '80s, when our correspondence dwindled to nothingness, Mark Smith of the Fall and I were something like friends. When he played L.A. we hung out, preferably in bars where he didn't expect to meet members of his band ("It's a bad idea to socialize with your musicians"). On one occasion, he berated me for going home with a woman he'd introduced me to, a rockwriter who when I kissed and fondled her had no panties and a dangling tampon string, oo wee. ("Sex is not a good motivating factor"). Before my VCR got stolen, I ran him a tape of *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, and he played me a cassette of songs about trucks by some actual trucker trying hard to sound like Dylan ("It's not the Dylan part that matters—it's the truck part"). He decried London as "too French," unlike Manchester, his home ("The Norman Conquest didn't make it that far north"). Back there during the Falkland Islands thing, he feigned a rooting interest in the U.K., contending it was "much too easy to side with Argentina." Mark E. Smith: a man of pith and whimsy.

As a band, as a musical realization of something, the Fall were more intelligent, more after-the-end-of-the-world (a/k/a/"post rock"), AND more sonically compelling than Sonic Youth (if less nerd empowering). The last of their albums he sent me was *Grotesque (After the Gramme)* (Rough Trade 18), which I must've played but don't remember, I'm sure it's a good'un. The cover is an old Dick Tracy-type guy gritting teeth like the likeness of Phil Alvin on the cover of the second Blasters LP. Speaking of which, of whom, the last time I saw the Fall play I was standing with Dave Alvin, who after a couple songs said, perplexed, "There's no hooks." "Well," said I, "that's the point."

Do I namedrop too much? Here's a name y'don't know: Ed Abramson, 53-35 Hollis Ct. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. Rubber stamped on the back of Bobby Darin's *That's All* (Atco 33-104), containing both "Mack the Knife" (though different from the '59 single version) and "Beyond the Sea," plus sixteen tons of hotcha-style pop filler. I haven't seen Ed since '66, but we lived in the same wing of the dorm, and somehow the alb ended up in my stack (I didn't steal it).

In November '63, he and I drove to Philly for a double date with high school cheerleaders. The big homecoming game, however, was canceled when the, uh, President got shot, as was the date itself when I didn't behave aggrievedly enough.

On the ride back, all you could hear on the radio was dirges and stuff, except for Canadian stations, fading in and out, on one of which we heard (for the first time) the Beatles, who would soon supply the accompaniment for post-JFK Ameri-teen whoop-de-doo, them and — that's right — the fabulous TRASHMEN, givers to the world of punk 13 years before the fact: "Surfin' Bird." I can't think of those weeks up till Christmas without feeling an equal rush of Beatles and Trashmen, who together, where I lived and breathed, kind of reinvented rock & roll, dead as a donut (as full-field hell-&-gone you name it) since, well, before Bobby Darin. Hey, believe it: that was the Gestalt, the context, the nexus, the TEXT. The literal HAND AS DEALT.

You take Sally and I'll take Sue...

It isn't so much that rock history is or must be revisionist (it generally is, but so what?) but simply, and more to the point, that it is and can't help but be visionist. Historical hands, insofar as they're dealt at all, are dealt to persons — to singles and multiples of 'em. Persons are touchstones of the *efficacy* of chronology; how history *did its thing*. What exactly happened? Everything. But sequence, hierarchy, synchronicity — scratch that — the assertion of all such meat 'n' taters, of a calculus and phenomenology of micro-moment progression, scale, nuance and tangent, is at least two thirds the statement, voiced or unvoiced, of each and every rockcritperson. His/her stab, strut and (in a nutshell) *oeuvre*.

Or let's do it this way. Every rockwriter (sportswriter) (geekwriter) has his/her own book of genesis. Has? *Exudes*. An Old Testament concatenated fable, Gospel according to fill-in-the-blank. Every critic a "witness," a zealot and crackpot, and everyone's testament different, heck, It had *better* be A fragment from MY glorious goddam scripture — the Absolute unfolds itself, thusly (take it or take it):

Re: anything besides punk that has had mainstream play since 1970. Things either get filed with the '70s (Alex Chilton, Steely Dan, the Replacements, R.E.M., Nirvana, Metallica) or the '80s (Sonic Youth and its partisans). There's no room left in the '60s, they're completely full (were full by late '67!; the '70s and '80s are still very sparse. Rap files perfectly with the black '60s — a separate warehouse finally almost full. Madonna goes with the pre-rock '50s, alongside Eddie Fisher, Springsteen is on the plane with Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper (Buddy Holly took the bus) (or rather: never quite fully existed). Did I say the rock '50s were over before Bobby Darin? They were over before Elvis entered the army (true). Hardcore Metal fits in with 19th Century classical — the intervals, the bombast, the ponderousness—nothing later than Bruckner. The '90s are an empty room.

It would appear there's a lotta Lavender Hill Mobs around. Perhaps you've seen Lavender Hill Mob the film, but I bet you've never seen Lavender Hill Mob the band or heard either of their TWO eponymous longplayers released within a year of each other, by the same label yet. And isn't there also a Lavender Hill Mob turkey breast, and a Lavender Hill Mob deodorant stick?

Wow and hey and fuckaduck, but I was actually at the session that produced the first of the L.H. Mob elpees (United Artists UA-LA719-G), late '76, the only time I got flown somewhere by a record company, as opposed to already being in the vicinity, just to attend a recording session. Snowy blowy Quebec, an hour from Montreal, wonderf'ly scenic, great food, nice kids in the band, incredibly civil for rock-n-rollers. A company gladhandler gave me perdocats. The Parti Quebecois won a big election that week: dancing in the streets. A goodtime all around. As a quid pro quo, I was all set to call this wholesome, some would prob'ly say innocuous, 6-piece combo, I dunno, "genuinely innocent," "vanguard of the anti-punk backlash" — whew — I can fling it with the best of 'em — but when Creem deemed them too marginal to bother with (unless, of course, U.A. advertised), I didn't have to.

These were also days of goodtimes with Justine, you remember her — before her alcoholin' got the final better o' things. A song on the album, "No One Compares," inspired me to compare her, all too favorably, to my previous galpersons. Clearly, I was asking for it. But for a brief twinkling even she would acknowledge that we were, yes, in RAPPORT — reference to a line in *Creation of the Humanoids* where the sister of Don Megowan, head of the robot-bashing Order of Flesh and Blood, boasts that she herself is in an advanced relational state with a robot, a "clicker" "Pax and I are in rapport." Justine was gonna print up announcements—"Justine and Richard are in rapport" — but never got around to it.

Fast forward to her abortion, to the day some weeks after it when, she was told a penis would again be fine, dandy, at least physiologically permissible. This could be the night I got lucky. She hadn't, far as I knew or believed, had a drink in the interim. Ring ring, door unlocked; there she was on the floor, an empty liter bottle at her feet. Couldn't shake her awake, she scowled and pushed me away. On a coffee table, a water glass with two inches of wine sat on my copy of *Lavender Hill Mob*, a red ring at its base. She probably hadn't played it (Abba was on the turntable), only used it as a coaster — how fastidious.

I split and returned with some objects she'd left at my place, dumping them beside her still comatose figure, which this time I made no attempt to disturb 'cept to pay

and sniff the enormous dark spot on her crotch and find it, yup, cold wee-wee), arranging them in a pile: her unread copy of my second book, a sneaker she'd once aimed at my TV, various undergarments a cotton blanket, her vegetable steamer and cosmetics case, a jar of French-import strawberry jam, half a box of Kotex nappies.

To the pile I added my wine-stained album, on the jacket of which I scrawled, J — Thanx for the rapport R.," then changed my mind, snatched it back, and have toted it with the rest of my lifeless belongings ever since.

Exhumable but rarely exhumed, my fifties/sixties singles pass time in a carton. Last one played: "Whispering Bells" by the Dell-Vikings, 'round 1986. It was totally beat to shit. By and large, they all are.

When you get down to it, the very idea of the single is rather amazing, and in retrospect almost preposterous. Two sides, one song per. One! — what forcible focus on the unit sonic offering! Not the pot luck of a many-unit album, but a treat acquired 'cause you've already heard it and like it. Too bad, 'cause we're also talking vinyl at its thinnest, frailest, most destructible, the "love is to kill" theme directed at unit targets. They may be jewels, gems — but for permanence they're fucking rhinestones.

Interesting, at this crossroad, that CDs have meant an end to two-sidedness; that 102 percent (approx.) of viable releases in the format have so far been REISSUES of analog vinyl (and shellac). Which is to say what?—that it's somewhat ridiculous for the CD to present us with the metaphor/illusion of indestructibility—"immortality" — which ballyhoo for the "unbreakable" LP once heralded too, y'know?—when the bulk of current sonic fodder is (dare it be said?) more ephemeral than ever?

But back to th' singles: yes they're maimed, mutilated, on a terminal gimp — way more than my average semi-retired LP — but that's hardly reason for leaving them *ALL* in the effing box. For exhuming *NONE* of them. Well, it ain't fear of disappointment — that I won't "enjoy" hearing some once favored tune for the first time in so many moons, or that it won't "satisfy" on some whacked-out, esoteric dotted line. 'S more like an eerie suspicion, a tingle on the back o' my neck which tells me that *ONE MORE PLAY* of anything might well use it up, play it *OUT*, for the remainder of my days; and that using up has gotta be a shoddier dance of loss/forever, a crummier outcome than merely losing access...losing track...um, um, forgetting..*LOSING YOUR WAY*.

Two trains running — two MORTALITIES — the music's and my own. Music that (I postulate) helped form me: to see a single component DRY UP lapse, is to feel my life dismantled one more notch—like left Goldblum and his vanishing body parts in the remake of *The Fly*.

"Fear of loss of being" — that Heidegger hokum from where was it, Being and Time? Finally, in 1998, I find an application that doesn't seem gratuitous. (Middle age can do that.)

A friend g-g-g-gone!—and I don't mean dead. Written off; written out. (I wouldn't piss on his grave.)

No names, no names, but he was a good friend, he was a bes' friend — then once he wasn't he was NO FRIEND. Somewhere in the middle, when he was just a mid-friend, he helped originate rockwriting. Wait — didn't I originate it? Give him an assist. He had a hand, was at least a catalyst, the person I tried some of this crap out on. A lot of my riffs came in dialogue with him. Which is something, considering how little he knew 'bout rock & roll — it was virtually all bluff. Like, here was a guy whose prior exemplar of musical ecstasy was *Carmina Burana* whose first try-on-for-size of what he took for rock/roll was *Trini Lopez Live at PJ's* (which you'll probably miss the humor of if you're under 45). *Meet the Searchers* (Kapp KL-1363) was his second.

Did ya know that the Brit Invasion, stage one, consisted solely of the Beatles, the Dave Clark Five, and the Searchers? — then maybe Peter and Gordon, possibly Gerry and the Pacemakers — it was six months (or more) before the first real U.S. impact of the Stones. Well, this pal, this buddy, championed the Searchers over the Beatles (his favorite Beatle — what a card! — was Stu Sutcliffe, the dead one), imagining a song or two of theirs more overtly "sexual" than either the known works of the Fab Four or his sub-novice's inkling of the rock norm. Putting his money where his mouth was, he bought *Meet the Searchers* (a/k/a *Needles & Pins*), then I did. From the condition o' my copy, I prob'ly spent more time perusing the cover (for Mearsey-beaters, they dressed and greased themselves like Joey Dee and the Starlites) than playing it. I've got no clear sense no more of what they ever could've meant to me, other than to look in the index to *Aesthetics of Rock* and see there's SEVEN entries for 'em...well that's his doing.

My buddy! my pal! who in the late '60s forwent a "career" in rock-crit (jus' kidding!: 'twurn't such thing) for a career in rock commerce, a career of rock evil?: that's putting it too poetically; who as manager of I won't even name *them* owed me much I never saw for band services/rendered, who fucked my royalties *royally* at a time, a

longtime, bloody years over which I could never consistently pay the rent (and was never out of debt); oh! The image of him in his \$50 cowboy hat with his four new cars and his roll of hundreds every time I'd ask him, *beg* him, for my fucking money. I wouldn't puke...

And wasn't there more?, didn't he try to "steal" my gal-of-the-time, one of 'em anyway; and he never invited me on a tour (although he took I won't name her either — to Europe yet), even just as a friend goddammit; and as a final insult sent me a gold record, so suitable for framing it was already framed, in lieu of any recent payment — whatsofuckinever — 'gainst the five figures by then legitimately if so improbably due...hoo!...a good deal of which can easily be writ off as just, well, ROCK AND ROLL, its wage, its consequence, its everyday walk-the-streets surface and substance, durn near everything but its music, ha ha ha ha ha, but more of which was plain basic treachery, perfidy, bad faith, non-generic interpersonal DOUBLECROSS.

I wouldn't puke on his mother.

Meanwhile, yonder in loss-of-beingville, the situation gets grimmer. It's all a house of cards, see, the whole setup, not just crapsheets with individual fuckin' oldies — 'cause that's what they are, ha ha — there's more to be concerned with than exhausting some tunes. I dread, well I no longer dread, I *know*: that prolonged listening to this old shit — shoot: prolonged thinking about! — will just as surely burn out ancient CONSTRUCTS entire sputtering SYSTEMS, the very MINDSETS in which the mix & match of any of this shit COHERES. The "natural process" of rock, insofar as it is rock, involves a systematic real-world/real-time/communal/personal playing out. All culture, certainly all of it built around the sequential offering of product — TV, movies, mags and books, cars, sports, clothing — is about turnover — a truism — but only rock foregrounds and RITUALIZES it in extremis. (Roll over, Beethoven...roll over, Plastic Bertrand.) And if that's the deal with IT, why should it be a different deal with *reflecting* on it, reflecting *truly* on it? Right? (Wrong?) (Another truism?)

Another approach. Regard less of the whatzis under scrutiny, there's always a basic fatuity, if not outright dishonesty, behind the tacit insistence that the true will f'rever *play* — that its vectors of *interest* are as perpetual as its rightness. Existential perpetuity is a pisser. Even with superficial taters like narrative structure — the warp and woof of the scrutinizer's "voice" — how many ties do you wanna read Sir Joe Bag-o-Donuts' definitive take on Late Renaissance painting, say? How many times

could you possibly wanna read *me*? How many times! wanna reassess (or even think) me?

The text-partaking self — yours, mine, everyfucker's — is not only historical (yawn yawn) but eschatological. It's also a very effective agent in the nullification (cum disintegration) (and I don't mean the ending) of history: its relegation to terminal irrelevance. Wake up one morning and old pet "hypotheses" are suddenly a little unwieldy — inapplicable — useless — the self can't use 'em (they give it the *creeps*) — to the point, ultimately, where NO specific retroview is any longer "worth advancing," even between one and oneself, any longer "tenable," and not so much 'cuz it can no longer be "tested" — it's just that further to-do would only render everything all the more trite — banal — "meaningless."

Which jar of your bones, Jim!...sap your breath...distort your hearing for your own concrete thoughts 'til they scream like the muddled static of distant homily.

Tutti frutti perpetooty...And if it's ROCK qua meaning (qua "art") we're wasting brain cells on, there ain't too many ways you can trick it up, bolster it, to insure it'll play even short perpetuity. Everything that rock rock rock and roll "is", it also isn't—and I'm not quoting general semantics—and when things start rolling down the hill and you're rolling with 'em) the ISN'T, believe me, is what will predominate...

The "sixties"? The "fifties"? One house of cards built upon another. Rock in its "primordial" form. Oh, you must mean *before* Rock-Surround—back when rock-roll was a bona fide *antidote* to the ills of the world, and not so central (or conspicuous) a source of them. Well, okay, if that's the case, yes—for that it would pay to look to the "sixties," the "fifties," or even the actual '60s and '50s. The actual '60s are grounded, actually, in the actual '50s, and the '50s as groundwork are a basement, a groundfloor, whose support time, strictly limited, has EXPIRED. People who think they know the '50s or the '60s but have only seen cartoon versions haven't a clue of the *fragility* of the whole damn thing; nor can they guess how long ago the mess came crashing down (during the '60s?—most of it) (after punk fell?—the rest of it), crashed silently. (Unless you're really listening, and why would you be?, silence doesn't announce itself.)

And here's the kicker: With or without your cooperation, your complicity, your personal suspension of systematic disbelief, NO VERSION of the fifties, real or imagined, can prop the mess up anymore, any more than can YOU on our own, in your most strenuous imaginings, your wildest, most neo-adolescent games of "pretend."

Oh, and furthermore, even if it could and you could: It can't SAVE you, any better than Jesus—Godzilla — the tooth fairy — can.

(Up the hill...down the hill. You would have to be a Buddhist, or a flaming masochist, to feel that this way/down is as groovy as its predecessor/up.)

"All is but knowing so," wrote Marcus Aurelius. Sounds about right, sure, maybe. But severe chronic knowing can lead to some nasty un-knowing...

Hey, remember flunk-rock? Now that was something. Held together with the spit, and warmed over by the belch, of history? *I don't doubt it.* David Byrne? *Oooh, he was an x-tremely big cheese.* Father of postlongshoremanism, wasn't he? *I thought it was postmormonism.* Tell me, is there some way outta here? *It starts with D.*

The disposable, too long undisposed of.

All dust in the wind.

What—another Searchers album? Uh...yeah: *Take Me for What I'm Worth* (Kapp KS-3477), their fourth, fifth, or maybe even last LP. Note the older-type shrinkwrap—that rubbery, stretchy kind of thick plastic—with "stereo" and "our price" in big letters, and a little map o' the U.S. The wrap is broken, so I probably played it, though I wouldn't bet on every cut. Arguably the wretched excess of my collection, but conditions did make its purchase my-t appealing.

Technically, Yale had finally expelled me—it was official—but by some crazy accident they forgot to cancel my last fellowship check, a big chunk of which I decided had to be spent on albums. Had to. I used to claim I blew the entire 600 bucks—there's a nice ring to that—or 400, but it was more like only 100 or 200 bucks.

In addition to the Searchers, I got the first Grateful Dead, the first Country Joe, *Over, Under, Sideways, Down* by the Yardbirds, everything I didn't have by the Kinks, at least a couple of Donovans, *Ascension* and *A Love Supreme*, the first Pharoah Sanders and the first Albert Ayler on ESP, and a slew of items I must've got rid of 10–15–20 years ago—the second Troggs (containing "With a Girl like You") Los Bravos (w/"Black is Black"), the Fortunes ("You've Got Your Troubles"), the Mindbenders without Wayne Fontana, the first solo alb by Gene Clark—all bought,

presumably, simply because there were there. After what the yalemonsters had put me through, how could I not take my reasonable share of frivolous war trophies?

Why I didn't sell the Searchers 10-15-20 years ago is one thing. Some records are old friends and old friendship, like new, isn't exclusively about good or bad, or even real affinity. Others are people you feel *sorry for*, and if the Searchers, in spring '67, were already obsolete, by the '80s even their dust was obsolete. Today, they're the last remaining piece of fellowship bounty that never became an integral part of my master stack; the purely meretricious of trophies (not even a belt buckle—or an ear—of the enemy; more like its lint), one as valueless as the graduate degree I never got.

MEANWHILE, an actual war was going on, y'know? No matter what I said about enriching the palette of philosophy, my real mission at Yale, the reason I became a grad school schmuck in the first place, was to delay getting drafted as long as possible. So dig the picture, I've been pummeled and poleaxed—rejected; daddy!—I don't have a job, a girlfriend, fucking “Nam is in full swing, but records'll redeem the day! Ah the Sixties; the blithering optimism of It all.

And six mints, make that six months later, Jacques Derrida came to Yale as a visiting professor. MISTER deconstruction or whatever—shit, he mighta been my thesis adviser (at least an ally). Good thing I missed him or I'd still be rotting academia.

Christ am I glad to be DONE with academia.

But who sez I'm done with it?

Having fled the academic gauntlet, escaped by the skin of my shoes, I walked smack into a new gauntlet about as depressing, and almost as draining, one with—what? Not again??—distinct academic coloration: Neo-academic? Crypto-academic? Pseudo-nonacademic?

Like femmes fatales who “don't know it,” or feign ignorance of the fact, can be — as they used to say— bad medicine. Bad enough. But wave the academic flag as if to disclaim it — “Only funning!” —while meantime masquerading as a practicing populist and you're fucking RAT POISON! A pair of parties I have known fit this bill, have fit it hand-in-glove for the last quarter century, behaving for all the world not merely like entrenched (and very constipated) academes but petty

administrators...self-tenured department heads...deans, by golly — well one of 'em anyway.

Did I tell you that Christgau, good old Bob, once dubbed himself The Dean of American Rock Critics? He had a T-shirt made up with his name above that title, and a likeness of Little Richard. What, you might wonder, could possess someone to adopt a handle so aridly pretentious, so dauntingly...insipid? Part was just ill-conceived hoax, as obtuse a sham as Springsteen's in bearing a nickname with zero proletarian verve — The Boss! — but in larger part, it did accurately convey the man's aura of swaggerless dogmatism. Both personally and professionally, he is one drably impetuous prick.

The Dean!—who to this day (in his syndicated "Consumer Guide") gives LETTER GRADES to albums and has a routine enabling him to monitor, or simulate monitoring the complete "curriculum"—every current release. Years ago, more than once, I saw him in action. He'd put six LPs on the changer, stack all the covers in the same sequence, go about his bizness. If he suddenly heard something to catch his fancy, he would count discs and check the covers — "Three, four — oh, isn't that something? — Tom Paxton." Nowadays, I would assume he's got a multi-CD unit with a digital display so he needn't even count: technology favors the lame. (Dean of what *branch* though? Admissions? Paper clips? Alphabetic studies?)

For us rock-crit underlings, The Dean in his incarnation as bigwig editor tried his darnedest to affect a supervisorly demeanor with an almost schoolmarmish (hit you with a ruler) façade. Looking back, it was sorta laughable, but every time I turned in an article, a review, sooner or later he'd phone, "Get your thesaurus — it's word choice time," and for two hours try and argue me out of certain key adjectives. Laughable but exasperating, and in hindsight, maybe mostly laughable.

It was more in his "intellectual oversight" capacity — as surveillance pilot at large, unpaid and unassigned, far above the rock-write fray — that this joker did me any lasting damage. In tandem with copilot/tag-team partner Griel Marcus, he at a crucial juncture blocked my progress to wider (um) recognition, effectively consigning me to marginality and in the long run has denied me any significant role in official — "authorized"— "accredited" rock-write (as opposed to rock) history. The annals — the archive — the fugsucking "pantheon". Oh yes — another pathetic house-o-cards for sure, but these two clowns act like they fucking OWN it.

And why do I care? Why do I care? I CARE.

It irks the hell out of me that while Marcus doesn't grade albums, he does grade people's CONDUCT, and conduct — alone! — is what kept me out of this high-bounty, high visibility anthology he edited, oh, probably 18-20 years ago — yup, another *old* grudge. *Stranded* he called it, and he asked purt near every living, breathing rock writer or rock-write pretender of even quasi-note to contribute an essay on his/her favorite album — the one you'd bring to a so called desert island. I know, I know cor-nee. But each contributor got \$750, a whole lot more than I'd ever made off a single piece.

And what kept me out; he told me three years later was my rude behavior at the final Sex Pistols show, the last of the Sid Vicious era, at Winterland. My job that night, well it wasn't a job, it was a labor of love, had been to go out and insult the audience before and after each band. Some guy from the Pistols' crew thought it all seemed too placid, too pat — "like a Grateful Dead show" — and asked me to give the ticketholders a jolt. All the invective in my arsenal I dispensed—in spades—I was one uncouth lout — until Bill Graham physically picked me up and threw me out of the building—"You can't insult my city!" Although what, precisely, was/is rocka rocka roll — or punk — or any kind of youth-twitch — supposed to entail "if not that?" If not the high risk of behaving like a FLYING FUCKING ASSHOLE?

Marcus, who had been there, and been offended, never expressed regret for the slight, the exclusion, but later in the '80s he averred that, knowing what he knew now, now that he "understood punk," he would NOT have excluded me. Oh, goody.

What I heard on the grapevine at the time the book came out was that he'd also disapproved of what I might write. The buzz was that Christgau who "knew" me better than Griel did, told him, "Oh, he'd probably pick a Doors album anyway" — an odious no-no to Bob and Griel both — but that's just rumor. In his forward to the 9th reprint of *Stranded*, Christgau, in a curious negative namedrop, draws attention to the lack of anything by "the irrepressible Richard Meltzer"...irrepressible? Is that like being a bon vivant? And if I couldn't be repressed, why the fuck did they have to repress me? (Like that of Meister Eckhart's cold Germanic God, my presence remained in my absence.

A more persistent rumble back thereabouts was that these bozos found my rockwriting "politically incorrect" (ostensibly: I wasn't as keen as they on helping rock-roll find, adjust, and micro-tune its moral/humanistic compass, or in lieu of its willingness to accept same, SUPERIMPOSING suchever upon it)—the first time I actually heard the now all too-familiar aspersion. Basically, this signified only a slight upping of the transgressional ante, as I had already been deemed of dubious intellectual grounding. As far back as '73, Christgau was branding me "anti-

intellectual”: in a saner universe (in his purview), I’d have been tarred, feathered, run out of town.

What’s daffy about *this* pair coming on so hoity-toity in their exercise of sovereignty is these’re guys who need a telescope to reach — approach — make out the general outline of whatever it is they purport to be confronting, so mega-removed are they from any tangible earthly what-the-hey. Like most culture wags laureate, what they are — all they are! — is pious OUTSIDERS. (Like Sam and Ann Charters.) Breast beating squares. (Like George Will and Norman Podhoretz...) Stuffed-shirt know-it-alls. (Like John Updike and Leonard Feather.)

As point-to-point-to-point arbiters of the socio-culturally valid, they’re as embarrassing as the Medved Brothers.

They don’t have the existential oo-poo-pa-doo to be trucking in anything so both high and low (and so alien to their alleged lives) as standard-issue rock and roll. In their frigging fifties, they haven’t caught on yet that one thing rock does rather *well*, too well to ignore or dismiss — one of its stock-in-trade — is SECOND-PERSON HOSTILITY. The many stations of I-dislike-you. Which isn’t “good” or any such easy-moral A-equals-A, certainly isn’t “nice,” but it’s the goddam rock-roll terrain, it’s fucking given. Might I add “universal”? Such itchy biz rubs Bob and Greil the wrong way, especially when the targeting is, well, non-rational, irrational, and above all “unjust.” Taxonomically prejudiced (and prejudicial). They insist, for inst, that ANYTIME a male gender-specific voice expresses antipathy to a non-male gender-specific other, UGLY SEXISM has reared its head—ring the alarm!—the voice forfeiting any claim to even antipathetic universality. It doesn’t matter, day, that the gender voicings could be reversed, that with minimal change a female subject could be cussing out, shitting all over, a male object...the ill will is as central to rock as it is to boxing...it doesn’t matter!

So meticulous have they been as rock watchdogs that they’ve troubled ‘emselves over what Kandy Newman might really ‘ve MEANT by “Short People” (yes — of course!, Randy’s being ironic — but should anyone even say these things?)...how poignant.

They try so-o-o hard to be good, caring New Deal Democrats, and good Boy Scouts, and far more telling, good boys, they’ve never been bad boys, never even tried it on for size. They wouldn’t dare commit adultery. Never farted in the subway. They don’t know danger from the inside looking out, locked away from any relief, asylum, and exterior safety net. Fuh, do they even know mischief? They’ve never tasted their own bile, never looked death in the eye in a mirror.

When I wrote somewhere that one of things which helped kill Lester Bangs was WRITING, each of them accused me of romanticism—how can writing kill?, they questioned. Well, guys, it doesn't always kill, but it certainly comes closest when you're doing it right. Only when it makes active use of your blood, your heart, your nerves, glands, sex fluids, vertebrae and whatall, and don't forget your stink, in a word: your body. In a word: your life. They were more annoyed, I would guess that I considered a pity rockwriting was the genre that gored Lester, that a diet of rock and nothing but had rendered him too dumb to get out of the way. At the risk of over extending my own 2nd-person animus and getting downright ad hominem about all o' this, I'm gonna introduce a new term to the proceedings: COOTIES. I don't give a ding dang doodle if these blockheads ever stumble on some remote semblance of the True, or accurately peg the Good and/or the Beautiful—the smutch of their imperialist intentions will contaminate anything they touch, their seal of approval rendering LESS ACCEPTABLE the goods of its unfortunate recipients. In my idea of a saner universe, the sight and sound of such card-carrying outsiders fattening up, even commentarily, on the goodies of the culturally/intellectually aboriginal would release fucking ANTIBODIES in the world. Imperialist cooties: nothing to sneeze at.

Or if “imperialist” sounds too vigorous and resourceful — too vibrantly alive — like Teddy Roosevelt or Cortez or somebody — let's just call it “proprietary.” Ideational as opposed to material proprietorship...dominion...superintendence of turf and sightlines. No matter how you slice it, the reigning King of Proprietary Cooties — let's print *that* on a shirt — is Griel Marcus.

It's hard to go very long without seeing this man's maiming-by-NOT-damning commentary on something. No other recent celebrity outsider — not Nat Hentoff, not Dr. Joyce Brothers—has functioned so relentlessly, so adamantly, as proponent, evaluator, certifier of relevance both passing and eternal, chalkboard huckster for so turgid a line of see-Spot-run. Michael Cuscuna? Well, that's only on jazz reissues.

So unremitting has he been in affixing his byline to so much NOT requiring his collusion, his stultifying illumination, and certainly not HIS italics, that every juxtaposition of it and *anything* has come to feel as WRONG (i.e., as corrupt) as the mating of basketball footage to “The Revolution Will Not be Televised” on a Nike commercial.

A couple of months ago, an article in the *New York Observer* complained about Marcus's liner notes for the reissue of the Harry Smith, Folkways anthology. Author Mark Schone's beef was that in gushing all over Harry there was an implied denigration of rival folklorist Alan Lomax, who Schone felt deserved a better fate.

What irritated me about Griel's presence in the package was simply that — his presence — although I could nitpick and say his lyric/historical spinout on Clarence Ashley's "The Coo Coo Bird," for one thing, bore traces of a METHODOLOGY of song dissection (and archaeology) I introduced to rock-crit (and yes, was better at) in my first published pieces 30 years ago...but fuck, I'm too much the folkie and populist myself to ever invoke an intellectual "copyright" — ownership isn't my game. (I don't own things in the air; I don't even own names I've given them.)

Anyway, it would've been preferable, I think, for Schone to have been more patient: chances are, left up to his proprietary avarice (the pipe dream: champion something and you'll forever be associated with it), that Griel would eventually have carved his name on Lomax's legacy too...and still may. Who/what won't he put his name on?

Hey: this is a man who accepted payment to report nightly on a MICHAEL JACKSON TOUR for Ted Koppel's *Nightline*.

He even put his grimy stamp on one of my books, the '87 reprint of *Aesthetics of Rock* — which he didn't even like. And I didn't ask for (I wanted Billy Altman), but he insisted and the publisher acquiesced. Wittingly or un-, his intro did little more than bracket the work, trivialize it (first paragraph: "I'm most of all convinced that the book is not a joke"; key word: "convinced" — thanks MUCH, you fucker), make it small (while lauding its hefty page count), *finite*, bounded, glibly sum-up-able, socially agreeable ("...the coolest book to be seen carrying"), no longer autonomous: a Griel endorsed hunk-o-pulp.

The endorsement didn't even improve my case with the endorser. So shallow had been his display of regard for me, so much did he not deem me even a colleague, that I didn't make it onto the mailing list for his own next book, *Lipstick Traces*, and he balked at first when I asked for a copy (how much humiliation did I think I needed?), telling me to go bother his publicist...he was in no mood to do so himself.

It wasn't mere protocol that prompted me to ask him, as this was the lome in which Griel reputedly "came to terms" with the events of Pistols night at Wlnterland. When I finally saw a copy, I wasn't in the index, or on stage at *his* Winterland, or anywhere else. Once an apparent eyesore, I was now beneath his notice (both forward and back).

It was a book which struck me also as, yes, derivative-secondary — and which M.T. Kinney would later proclaim a "broken-leg try at duplicating the Everest climb R. Meltzer pulled off in *The Aesthetics of Rock*. On an insight level it's the pits" — he said it, not me.

So what the hell am I after?

My due.

Don't think I want credit for having "influenced" Greil, or Bob, or the pen-pushers of their cardboard academy, for trailblazing an activity which inevitably *leads to them*. I didn't (and if I had, I would rather I hadn't) and I don't.

But if they didn't actually "get it from" me, plenty of it, it didn't hurt 'em to have me as a forerunner. To have my trial-and-error, naked as it was, ease the path and prime the pump.

Credit? I want credit for being Copernicus—Magellan—goddam Socrates to their coffee-table Thoreau—and Thoreau to their Michael Medved. (Do you have any idea how degrading it is at this stage of my life to have to beat my own drum? What such a dance does to my "dignity""? They can kiss my fucking feet.)

Lester Young once said of Stan Getz, who profited mightily from a saxophone way-of-being Lester had pioneered: "There he goes driving my pink Cadillac." I don't want no Cadillac (though a middleclass income, after all these years, would be o.k.); I want to terminate the academy.

And what, *precisely*, is it that gives me the willies about the ascendancy of their shit and not mine—other than the obvious?

The reality of their ultimate message. Everything they write testifies: there is no you. Nothing is possible. Regardless of what they imagine or wish it to be saying.

Seeing this travesty and obsessing on its repercussion forces me to redouble my efforts... I'm tired and tired and thinkin' I might maybe resign from this sorriest of "callings," and here I am stuck with a bran' new mission.

Needed (first things first): a countercooties to their cooties on everything. On things I still love.

Shit.

Come one, come all, come onna my house! Come alooka my c'lection.

Hardly nobody comes t' see me no more — I bore their ear off with "war stories", heh heh. The shameless EXHIBITIONIST in me is left holdin' the bag — oh woe — but in an alternate lifetime in the weeks preceding my death, visitors galore will come & pay their "respects," and with whatever sumthin' I have got left I'll lead 'em to my *special albs* — ones I've retained mainly so strangers will ooh and ahh. People I've found, are impressionable—sometimes you c'n impress them. (I so much want th'm to love me—doesn't ev'rybody?)

Those that're lucky and "suck up" to me enuff — just jukin', 'scuse me, jokin'! — or can prove they have read at least FOUR of my books, I'll give a fistful of albums to...my patrimony. Ain't got no offspring— childless — and the broad I'm livin' with, my final surviving womanperson, she don't care about this stuff — she'd just go & sell it. Besides, she's an old y'know, an old person — old as me anyway — how much time's she got? Y' can't take it w/ you — I can't—and neither can she, but THEY can take it HOME.

Watch out for spiders, don't mind the dust 'n' dinge — follow me, single file. Jazz upstairs, step lively...then the cellar.

Lookit: Thelonious Monk's signachoor on Five by Monk by Five, source of the title — that's all — of the Stones' 12 x5, a big sweeping hand; the LATE RICHARD GROSSMAN'S copy of Jimmy Giuffre's Western Suite, nice cactus, doncha think?

Duke Ellington, Second Sacred Concert — a stinker, to put it mildly. Even with "A" personnel—Johnny Hodge's ain't dead yet, Harry Carney, Paul Gonsalves, Lawrence Brown—'s almost as lousy as the one he did with Teresa Brewer, pee yew. Check out the cover, tho: Salvation Army sticker. And inside: tickets to th' actual concert, row I, signed by the Duke. The owner musta died and some dumbbell relative junked it.

Claude Nougaro, Femmes et famines — what an ugly Zappa ripoff cover. He's got stigmata, what's the singular, a stigmatum? stigma? There's only just one cut, "Gloria"—not the "Gloria"—Ornette backs him up—a 14th-rate sweaty French chantoozer.

Billy Harper, Black Saint, first release on Black Saint the label, where's it, shit, I musta sold it. NO—could I've sold it?—I'm losin' my marbles. Or has the old lady been sellin'? Or stoleden by some "caller"...shee. C'mon downstairs...

Hackamore Brick, One Kiss Leads to Another, One o' the great bands y' never heard, protopunk. "Zip Gun Woman," "I Watched You Rhumba" — before the punk nut got

cracked, it seemed like t'get there you hadda throw in a stiff dose o' the '50s. Urban shabbiness, y'know, was a major early rock-roll ingredient. Look at this guy, Tommy Moonlight—and this was before Tom Verlaine, speaking of jive names, who the world coulda done without anyway.

Flamin' groovies, 'nother quirky (though not too quirky) '70s chip-off-the '50s. Less obscure than, more like an overrated pseudo-pre-punk — cult band. Their last halfway decent, Teenage Head. The "Flame-Ettes, "that's me, I was drunk in the studio, they needed handclaps. Me, Karin Berg, ah Karin—she and I were once...I won't say — and Jean-Charles Costa, my editor I b'lieve, can't remem'—a late installment of Crawdad? Boones Farm — was that apple wine? — and I couldn't keep th' beat, couldn't feel the timing, hadda watch them t' keep it up.

Lester Bangs, Jook Savages on the Brazos, only one that came out while he was alive. 'S kinda awful, he was doin' GALLONS of Romilar then, but he was my frien'—ya didn't know that?—I wouldn't sell it. (You got twunny-fi' bucks?)

Velvets w/ the banana, a piece of the peel's missing but see, it was paper — not plastic...Satanic Majesties w/the plastic "optical" thing — you're s'posed to be able to see Hendrix somewhere — I've never seen him...Metamorphosis — I doubt this is on CD—buncha gay stuff they put out after the Stones went to Atlantic — "I'd Much Rather Be with the Boys"—wanna hear it?

More recent Brit shit? — okay. Scritti Politti, 12-inch 45—what's this even called? 4 A Sides? Pre-Langue Release? How post-modrin. One "side," which?, I'm never sure, makes ref to Mussolini.

Bow Wow Wow, See Jungle! See Jungle! One o' the seven or eight greatest rock songs, make that pop songs of all time: "Chihuahua." A strange, almost a '50s kinda feel—do I overstate my "thing" for the '50s?

WAIT — where's my Blurt in Berlin...first two Mekons...Pindrop by the Passage...Prag Vec...the Australian pressing of the first Public Image??? There is something VERY WRONG 'round here, somebody's been, can't they wait for me to "go"? The greedy whezers...50 years of compulsive ecet'ra gone to nought...I can't bear it...

THUMP THUMP THUMP...my ticker...this is IT.

Okay — each of you take 11 records — my fav'rite number — and leave the rest f'r Jimmy McDonough, 1040 Willow Ave., Hoboken, NJ 07030. I'll give yer regards to Tommy Bolin...Gene Krupa...Charlie Watts..oh th'pain, th' pain, th'...

So what was that brouhaha about “calling”?

Am I a goddam teacher — is that it? An “impartor of ‘wisdom’? Entertainer with a lesson plan”?

Or am I he who distances you from all teachers: “think for yourself or perish”? (Rock itself, when it was a full-service enterprise, once fulfilled this function.)

Or just another overreacher struggling in vain to have the verbal side of life catchup, aloud, with the experiential? A head full of too many ideas, leaking, spilling — where to begin *directing* them? (It would seem that I’m the only man/alive whose writing is informed EQUALLY by boxing and wrestling, by jazz and rock...that’s a lotta mental baggage!) The printed page as recycle bin: pass it on, reassign responsibility for babysitting hotstuff with no ongoing use even as ballast—I’m already top heavy—yet too valuable to treat as mere trash, to relegate to some nameless ideative landfill.

Or am I nothing but a blowhard in neurotic need of an audience—as brazen as any attention seeker with a lampshade on his head? (Character in a comic book...light bulb above his hairline flashes ON...next frame, a balloon: “Yes! I’ll wear that ‘shade awhile!”)

If I jest, it’s to deflect your judgment and mire re my state of denial ‘bout this teacher b.s. In the final analysis, I’m as culpably, reprehensibly didactic (pedantic!) as anybody. To properly do my job, I have not only to hold *my* act together — keep it coherent—but also the world’s. While no snooping academic, I mind the world’s business — in the WORST way — and I don’t mean I read the morning paper. (Or The Nation.) But you’re in this too. Should we both accept the assignment; we get to meet in the middle, in a middle. You need to read it, I need to write it...ain’t life a scream?

Psst! Mesdames et messieurs! The lowdown on...received cultural dandruff. I was a kid when rocka-roll was a kid — before the controls were set—and kidhood is half the story...regrettably. Before MTV? I was around before teevee! Eight years before Elvis was on, and that’s not long at all, er, the *young* Elvis, not the old fat one they declared a saint in the name of crowd control, you had Hopalong Cass — hey, don’t go to sleep, I’ll get to the *good part* soon enough. Cut me some slack, okay? I feel like the misfit in *Pebble in the Sky*, time traveling to straighten out, rectify mis —oh, you don’t know that one, Issac Asimov?, also before?, well that’s alright, I’ll just blah blah blah blah blah blah.

Off with his hat.

Which still leaves my, uh custodial duties...Curator and Propmaster, Vinyl Division, RECORDS: THE BURDEN, THE COMMITMENT. Even as props behind dark, gloomy curtains in airless subbasements, they're essential the way all designated essentials are: the universe would topple without them (but it all depends how strongly you designate). Like yellowed maps and extinct textbooks from everybody's squalid grade-school prison stay, without 'em the student-teacher charade just can't be "authentic." Besides, they're more for me than for you. Like a fat, over-the-hill Jake LaMotta, clinging to the mantra of Brando's "contender" speech at the end of *Raging Bull*, I need the ritual *fact* of my records (in all their balmy uselessness) in order to DEEM MYSELF armed and dangerous. So I can go to another room, as revved up as I'll ever be, for a FORMERLY EASY task. (with the "whole world," in a microcosm watching.)

I wish my fetishes on no one.

Now let's get REALLY ponderous. Everything gets tougher. Nothing gets easier in this doghump of a life. While my powers ebb, THE BOULDER GETS BIGGER...the Sisyphus benchpress. My freaking task and welcome to it: to maintain the delicate filigree of my infrastructure for data retrieval, y'know from old hibernating LPs, maintain it by any means nec.; to coddle the collection, personal,ating to each and every disc, that they might rest in readiness to someday (should it be required) yield their secrets, thus aiding me in not only putting my finger on but demonstrating to others what it wuz *that* it wuz, and in the process make prehistory "live again," as bizarre and implausible an eventuality as all the souls of all the departed being reconnected to bodies *some fine day*; to midwife a flame, long extinguished, which no match, no Bic, no collision with a comet can rekindle. This is some jolly gold-from-lead, square-the-circle, angels-on-pinheads-type horseshit, folks!

But, all demons being equal, I think I'd rather be propmaster, worrying about decrepit matter, than propwriter, having to articulate its import. (Demons encountered either way.) Of the two cheez endgames, only one of which can KILL—as this piece, now 10 months old, is within a hair's breadth of doing—I would much rather fret over my shitty records than write about them.

Off with his face.

In *The Western Lands*, for all intents and porpoises William Burroughs' last important fictional work, the narrator (an old writer identical to the author himself) set before himself the chore of *writing himself out of death*. Out of ever having to die. At book's

end, so near/so far, he gazes upon a literal river of shit, uncrossable—the final image of finality, of mission failure. “The old writer couldn’t write anymore because he had reached the end of words, the end of what can be done with words.”

All I’m trying to do—while failing just as miserably—is writing myself out of the rock-write equation.

Look. Some days, possibly most, it occurs to me (in no uncertain terms) that rock, and all writing about it, has NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING. Y’know: “anymore.” Imagine a world where many, many too many people wrote about...meatless lasagna. (And thought they were hip—and “on to something”—for doing it.)

Do I really really really really really want originator’s credit, or do I disown it? “I just think it should be my call. (I’ll keep you posted.)”

Off with his head.

I am the prophet of, of...oh, it’ll come to me. It’s it...was...well,

Um,

I FORGET.

I need to hear, I need to hear...”Where Have All the Good Times Gone.” Kinks. One of the great mid-’50s masterpieces. *On The Kink Kontroversy* (Reprise RS 6197). Let ‘er rip...

“Time was on my side”...”easy ride”...”yesterday”...”feet back on the ground”—well, it certainly is “the densest reference-tongue field known to man” (Borneo Jimmy was right).

Nice riff: dum...dum...dum. But it’s phoo, it’s very tinny sounding...mushy...is that fake stereo? I’m not complaining, but soundwise it isn’t all that...tumultuous. You’d a thought...huh.

And again. Hmm.

Three times? Well...for the road. For the good times. Where the piss-shitty HELL did they go?

Great song, g'bye.

It will never come back to me.

"How really and truly cosmic this li'l 'treatise' would be," l'auteur dit (and I translate), "if only I could recall what it was I was on the VERGE of getting at."

Writing about music is *not* like dancing about architecture. Writing tends to be about. Writing about music is not very different from writing about trees. (Writing about *writing*, on the other hand, might be *something* like architecture about architecture — if only architecture could itself be about things: structure sussing out structure, self-consciousness on self-consciousness.) My objections to writing about music are not about untangling metaphors.

The vast ocean that separates any particular piece of music (as one order of things) from its impact on humans of the species (as another) is *unbridgeable*. They occupy different dimensions; they're apples and oranges, vastly different beasts. ("Correlate" them at your own risk.) Lester Bangs told me about some mental patient he met who claimed to've been "helped" by such and such a Black Sabbath album, as if, well, that was Sabbath's value. That they were IN TOUCH WITH various "disturbed states," and delivered an unsettling (yet right-on) mix of associated highs and lows....and maybe so. But isn't it likely that twice, three times, 40 times as many have been helped through the occasional horror by Carole King or the Captain and fucking Tennille? Merle Haggard? Alvin & the Chipmunks? The Monkees? Who are or aren't any more/any less genuinely in touch with...whatever. The POWER OF MUSIC—it's everything, and nothing. Like love to Colette, it's the great commonplace. Somewhat suspect when applied too globally, too generally. (Second opinion from Lou Reed? Art Schopenhauer? John Sebastian?)

A tougher question than Am I a rockwriter?: (Do I even really qualify?) (Am I "overqualified"?)

Three trains running, four trains, five and more. "There's the Soul Train, and the Coltrane, but gimme that good ol' dumb ol' Rock & Roll Train." IS THERE ALSO a rockwrite train? WHERE might it go? NOT the Land of Oo-bla-dee. NOT Old Cape Cod. NO longer stops at llikeitlikethat. The local but not the express. I have rid' the train—I think I'm sure I believe I know. But I don't know I don't know I don't know (I cannot be certain): maybe it's just my train, not their train. NO; I am not the only rider—I see multitudes of others—but I wonder am I the only one paying FULL

VERBAL FARE? Or is this a dream? (Is it Buddhism yet?) From a crackling loudspeaker: "Flaunt signature verbiage or die." OK, OK...I'll pay...

I changed my mind.

I lied.

All I have is yours.

I'm too, too generous.

Don't take me seriously.

No more serious than your life.

Don't tread on me.

Correct me if I'm wrong.

School is out.

Clothing optional!

Fast 'n loose.

C'mon, pick a fight with me.

*Write me a letter, drop me a line. (if you're female and under 50, enclose a pic.)
(And if, by chance, it's 1972: a pubic hair.)*

I begin with truth.

Truth, that whore.

You're better off without her/him/it.

Can't you take a fucking joke?

Forget it.

If you can read this, you can write this.

You couldn't write this with a gun (knife) (crossbow) at your head.

Hey, d' I ever tell you the one about...?

Too solemn for words.

(As your, ahem, teacher, it is my obligation to inform you that) it's OVER...so turn out the light.

Or did I catch the WRONG rockwrite train?

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Best Of

Lester Bangs recollected in tranquility

Richard Meltzer did have deep affection for the bastard

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

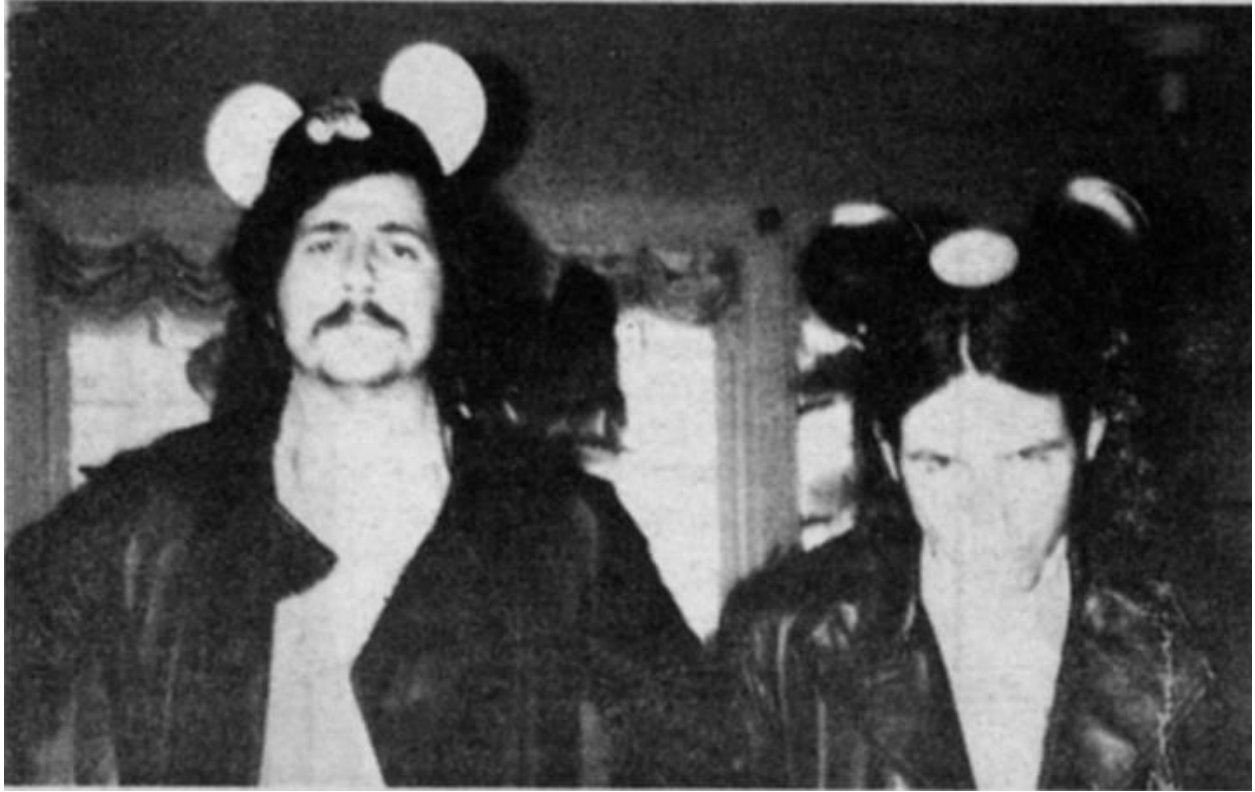
[Dec. 6, 1984](#)

Music scene



Lester Bangs at home in NYC, 1981. I get this call from Nick Tosches requesting that I please take Lester, who'd shown up at his door on acid, "off my hands."

On December 14th, this December 14th, Lester Conway Bangs, while probably not the greatest writer of his generation, arguably its most vital so far to die, would have been 36. Haunted and driven by demons, so-called, a cheerless many of whom/what/ which — or their kindred ilk — he directly sought, found cum stumbled upon, or was inadvertently ensnared by on the demon picnic grounds of Rock and Roll, he never made it to 34.



Following the lead of a handful of babes in the rock-critical woods, one of which I'll admit (if sometimes reluctantly) to having been. Bangs at the dawn of the seventies played as prominent a role as anyone in both expanding the expressive boundaries of rockwriting as a form and giving it a voice that played the newer, more mannered and cautious, mass-market rockmags like Rolling Stone and Creem — the latter of which he even edited for awhile — as on the dime as it had played the catch-as-catch-can, limited-edition fanzines whence it came. Though he also served as the burgeoning genre's most prolific scribbler, a mission he sustained with relative ease for the bulk of his days, it is to the man's lasting credit that he rarely delivered copy on anyone's dotted line. In fact, he probably "got away with more" in major-publication print than all his rockwrite brethren combined, conceivably (however) because it merely simplified matters to have a single Designated Outlaw, one entrusted with a blanche enough carte — and unmonitored options galore — to spike with "authenticity " a rock-media stew of bogus Freedom and ersatz Candor.



Retrospectively cliched or not, there was an existential purity to the sheer commitment evinced by Lester's prolonged wallow in (and about) the rock- and-roll Thing-in-itself. It was, in many ways, the critical headbang to end all critical headbangs; it would be hard to even imagine, for instance, a professional art-film bozo, a jock-sniffing sports jerk, or a food-review lunatic more uninsulatedly gung-ho vis-a-vis x — either as primary experience or typewrite wankery. His patented shameless multipage gush, coupled with an unswerving advocacy of certain conspicuously over- the-top rock genera (Velvet Underground offshoots; Heavy Metal; Punk Rock), made him a must-read favorite with both cognoscenti and dipshits alike, and he came as close to encountering idolatry per se as any non-musician in R&R. A good deal of which — natch — could not help hitting the self-consciousness fan, but while a man's life was ultimately undone in the process ("I'm Lester — buy me a drink! "), the integrity of his art/craft was essentially unaffected. For, while he might have been a tad too glib-messianic those last couple years, he was by no stretch of things an opportunist, never really giving a hoot for what in squaresville would be known as a career. (Or, perhaps, unlike his role model Kerouac, he simply didn't live long enough for that, too, to be strenuously tested.)



In any event: dead, cremated, literal ashes. California born (Escondido '48), bred (El Cajon, ages 9-23), and traveled (I first hung with him in San Francisco, last in L.A.), Lester bought the big one on the opposite coast — his final home, the fabled Apple — April 30/82, ostensibly from a hefty pull of darvon employed, in lieu of aspirin, to placate the flu. Since his death, variously interpreted as a mile-radius teardrop's once-in-a-lifetime terminal burst, a joke and a half on both himself and his precious chosen whole damn Thing, and — by occasional uncouth louts — the final glorious triumph of his excess, the spectrum of Bangs-in-ongoing-print has dwindled from monochromatic /sparse to colorless/ nonexistent. Of the two books in his name which appeared during his lifetime, quasi-coffeetable numbers on Blondie and Rod Stewart, neither a particularly representative Lestorian effort (or even particularly good: the former admittedly hacked out "in two days on speed," and looking it, i. e., ad hoc and forced; the latter disowned as a clumsy, if innocent, foray into "writing as whoring"), both are either out of print — officially — or on the back burner of barely having ever been in same, at least as regards this coast,

where I've yet to see either in bookstore one. Nor have two posthumous whatsems. Rock Gomorrah, cowritten (early '82) with L.A.'s Michael Ochs, and a projected collection of unpublished fragments scrounged from Bangs's apartment a day or two after his death, gotten more than inches off the publishing ground — the former for reasons which if herein revealed would get me sued but good, the latter because, in the words of editor Greil Marcus, "the stuff is less tractable than I thought at less than 5000 words or so." Also stalled, and/or abandoned (and/ or nonspecific pipedreams to begin with) : all known plans to reissue out-of- print Live Wire LP Jook Savages on the Brazos, recorded, Austin, TX, Dec. '80, by Lester Bangs & the Delinquents, lyrics and vocals by guess who. In fact, the only anything by L. C. Bangs readily available where availables are sold is his liner copy for The Fugs Greatest Hits Vol. I, released by PVC/Adelphi some months after he'd croaked, for which he (or rather his atoms) later copped a Grammy nomination, and for which, reliable word has it, he never was paid.

Well, I've been proven wrong; it hasn't been easy recollecting Lester in even half a toto in so much tranquility. Didn't seem like such a bad idea back when obits were appearing left & right and at least two- thirds of 'em smacked of revisionism at its well-intentioned worst; having ridden the range with the guy, having been as intimate with his daytime/nighttime revealed essence — I would bet my boots — as anyone in or out of various possible beds with him, I had fiery goddam galaxies to say in his behalf that were simply not being said, at least not in print by his designated peers; and, although my no longer living in New York couldn't help but delay my shot, remote and after-the-fact seemed like the ticket, y'know *anyway*, for some major necessary rerevision.

But here it is two, two and a half years gone & more, and whuddaya know if all the raw goddam pain (at the loss of, yes, a brother) and jagged fucking anger (at a waste of life, life-force, and relative inconsequential like "talent" and "genius"), an unbeatable duo which for weeks, weeks, months gave the Lester totality so cosmic a shape, scale and intensity, have by their own inevitable burnout given way to the contemplation of standard-issue mere data, of the skeletal remains of a larger-than-life life which have come to make sense (or not) in too neat, too linear, a manner. Well — hey — fuggit: Even if grocery lists, chalk diagrams and hokey storytellin' are the forms ongoing life-as-life has imposed on the mission, there's still a heap of essential Lester *information* that could use, uh, exposure to printed-page light.

What too many write-biz intimates sought to do in the wake of his death was debunk the Lester Legend (solely) by reciting evidence that his bark was worse than his bite. While I'm sure he'd have "wanted it done" (i.e., have the saga-as- litany scraped of treacherous barnacles, or at least of *their* treacherous vogue), I can't imagine the projected post-life *intent* of such a wish as in any way entailing cosmetic overhaul, especially in the service of moral/experiential object lessonhood. Lester's day-to-day transaction with post-adolescent life-as- dealt was — let's be conservative — 94 % *anything but pretty*. If he'd have wanted his entire whatsis to serve up viable scenarios for intimates and non-intimates alike (gee, would the Pope *prefer* to be Catholic?), there's no way the deal'd come out even *provisionally* Lester-functional without interested non-intimates having retroactive access to as hefty an eyeful of the not-so-pretty — in all its hideous, non-Clearasiled blah blah blah — as intimates galore regularly managed to cop and, in their various personal ways, have *already* learned from. To deglorify an earlier incarnation of shit (which the man himself was clearly hellbent on doing in his waning days on earth) you've got to at least speak its name — loudly! — for the whole entire planet: c'mon now, one & all. A solemn responsibility (I call it) which, credibly/incredibly, the smelly sumbitch's closest associates have, to this day, all but refused to consider.

To wit: For every time *anyone* saw the defanged, declawed Lester teddy bear rear its cuddly li'l head (see obits 2, 3, 5 & 7) the man was *uncountable times* the asshole, the buffoon, the sodden tyrant; been those things myself — in semi-prior lifetimes — so I know. Back in '73, for inst, the soon-to-be-dead Lillian Roxon gushed shameless love for the s.o.b., in New York on *Creem* business, ordering up a Lester button and leaving it in his hotel box; response to this purest of offerings was "What's that fat cunt *want* from me?" About a year later I get this call from Nick Tosches requesting that I please take Lester, who'd shown up at his door on acid, "off my hands"; took him to a party at John Wilcock's place, during which he verbally *brutalized* Wilcock's wife (in green Fingernails) for being a "hooker," snapped at an affable Ed Sanders for being "the only alkie in the counter-culture," and had nothing more to say to Les Levine's Asian girlfriend (wife?) than "Yoko is a lousy gook"; further into the night, at Vincent's Clam Bar in Little Italy, he literally bellowed (more than twice), "There's a lotta tackin' *wops* in this joint." And how can I forget the way he treated me and Nick, his closest approximate *friends* f'r crying out loud, as our wonderful editor while at *Creem*? He'd call us each up at 3 a.m. to urgently solicit various (rather specific) reams of pap, needed via Special D *toot sweet*; we'd climb outta bed, peck away bleary-eyed to whack out the closest possible takes on what he'd claimed he wanted, whereupon he'd reject 'em with a *vengeance* ("I won't print *beatnik shit*"), then run thoroughly like-minded i. somethings — under his own byline — or with our words, usually verbatim, laced

throughout. Just a few “examples,” dunno if they sound like big stuff or small, in any event *typical Lester*, with plenty, plenty more where they came from — y’know times n-plus-many.

In spite of such anticomunal upchuck, or quite possibly *because* of it — post-adolescent of a post-summer-of-love feather & all that — I did have deep affection for the bastard during my final years in New York; he could really piss me off (and I, I’m assuming, him) but bygones were always eventually ditto. In those days I generally shared his affection for The Edge, and might even’ve *gone extreme* slightly ahead of him; in January ’72, this is true, he actually dubbed *me* “the Neal Cassady of rock and roll.” But by fall ’75, when I split New York to at least *simulate* an escape from the Frantic and Hyper (and he subsequently arrived, ostensibly to *embrace* same), I was feeling the first stirrings of apprehension re my own prolonged massive intake of Edge Substances (emotional, cultural, but above all chemical) and was on the verge of an early series of attempts to, y’know, *cut down*, to maybe get off my collision course with all sorts of walls, both metaphoric and real. Lester, meantime, seemed on a rapid *upswing* in the intake dept.; what had so far served as mere horizon or frame for his trip, or at most been its semi-essential *fuel*, was now lunging headlong for the foreground of his life ... or should we call it the twin foregrounds (life as Mythic Construct; life as physical/emotional/cultural Hard Mundane Reality).

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Hey, the guy was beginning to scare me. Certainly as an advanced — or rapidly advancing — version of what I no longer wanted to be and could (possibly) imagine once again becoming, but more as this vivid, palpable spectre of specialized human decomp not just out there but right there: a pal & a buddy headed (willy nilly?) for the sewer. From late ’75 immediately onward, on those unlikely occasions when separate coasts — underscored by far fewer rockwrite junkets — any longer allowed for it, I was usually unable to handle being in the same room with him, knowing I’d have to witness whole new increments of what could really no longer be passed off as anything but (gosh) misery and (dig it) horror. Where in the earlier ’70s it was almost cute — once in a while — the way Lester would stumble into classic self-directed drunk jokes (like the time he called me from the Detroit airport to tell me he was headed for an Alice Cooper show in London, presumably England, only he’d drunkenly got it wrong and was on his way to London, Ontario), there was this half-week in ’79, for inst, during which he hung out at Michael Ochs’s house in Venice with no daily design but to get skid-row-calibre gone and stay there, that was just fucking grim. Looking an unhealthy as I’d ever seen him, basic shit-warmed over with an ngly bump on his forehead (which he claimed he was “treating with Romilar”), he

refused to eat without an Occasion. When, one evening, Michael and I pretty much dragged him to a Mexican restaurant, he refused to actually step inside until he'd fortified himself with the cottons from six Benzedrex inhalers — the local pharmacist was out of Romilar — busted open on the sidewalk with a shoe.

Washing down their remnants with a Dos Equis as his enchilada sat there staring at him, he quoted (or claimed he was quoting) Sid Vicious: "Food is boring."

So, inevitably, when Billy Altman rang me up from N.Y. Clearly on a California morn, to let me hear it straight from a friend — "instead of from a creep" — my immediate response to no more Lester, steps ahead of all the pain & anger & whut, was *holy fucking shit, the fucker finally did it*; it'd been in the real-world cards for long-long times for Lester to cease to be. Though even on his gonest days he was no way a classic cornball suicide-romantic — heck, I don't really think he was all that clinically *suicidal* (big-sleep fantasies never overtly/covertly lured him, not even metaphorically, from the *darkest* sub-basement of his World of Dread; nor was Danger, though he often nonstop lived it, itself the merest tickle of a ripple of a *thrill* for him, a context before the fact) — he'd sure staged more corny, frightful dress rehearsals than Jim Jones plus Judy Garland (squared) for simply *ending up dead*.

Biggest of which I ever saw was January '81. I'm at Nick's place in New York, en route back to L. A. from Montreal, when who should pay a surprise *visite* but Mr. Bangs, cassette in hand. It's a tape of these tracks recorded during an Austin romp I'd heard about second or third hand (he'd planned to "live there forever," it was said, 'til a night in the local drunk tank — on top of who knows *what* else — totally changed his mind), and in the course of the next 12-15 hours he played it, for us and at us, *many times*. Also during this stretch, after boasting, rather proudly, that he no longer drank, he managed to ingest at least 36 cough- suppressant tablets (three 12-packs of Ornical — we weren't always watching) washed down with sizable slugs of bourbon, as there was nothing else but water to wash 'em down *with*.

All stages of this ordeal, in which Nick and I were little more than foils for surge upon surge of what we'd come to regard as typical Lestorian bathos, were hardly bearable in the state we were in (after far too many "nights with Lester," going back to the days when we even could dig it, we'd opted for a change to take this one *straight*), but the morning-after phase was literally one for the books. On the umpteenth playback of what was soon to hit the racks as the *Jook Savages* LP, Lester insisted that one particular vocal was pure Richard Hell (in Lester's cosmos an a priori yay); my dogtired no-big-deal of a response was it sounded existentially neater than that, more on the order of Tom Verlaine (a Lester nuh-nuh-*no*).

Suddenly hair-trigger sensitive — in a *performance*-trigger vein — he tapdanced back with “Then I might as well go *sell shoes* in El Cajon.” Next cut he compared himself to somebody (very contempo) else, prompting me to comment, for non-pejorative, sleep-denied better or worse, that his vocals (across the board; in general) had the same basic flavor as those on such country-western *parodies* as *Sanders’ Truckstop* or the Statler Brothers’ *Johnny Mack Brown High School* LP. Affecting grievous offense, as if any of his b.s. actually mattered (the Lester of ’73/’74 — in *any* chemical state — would merely’ve giggled), he took things up a full notch of indignant/sarcastic: “Well I guess I’m just *no fucking good*. ”

But he wouldn’t stop playing the crap, not with every cut looming as a supercharged occasion for kneejerk call-and-response, a challenge for him to goad Nick and/or me into goading him, in turn, into mock-self-deprecatory one-liners *ad nauseum* — a dress rehearsal, as it were — his puke-stained sweater seemed appropriate — for his triumphant appearance on *Johnny Carson*, which he had no doubt the worldwide success of his Blondie book would imminently *require* . . . along with a shot of his mug, cleanshaven, on the cover of *People* (over which he whined “fear” of besmirched personal image).

Ultimately Nick and I, weary of further compliance in so shoddy an interpersonal number, old buddy or not (and/or old bud in particular), found ourselves laughing in his face; enough was enough, and the sight of this bumbling mammal going gaga for an audience of two-who-knew- better was kind of otherworldly amusing. The object of our yuks, however, took it as us laughing *with* him: Great Moments in Standup/Audience Rapport! Swollen with illusory (or whatever) whacked-out self, Lester then proceeded to announce his *program*: (1) to save Rock & Roll; (2) to become president (presumably Oi the U.S. of A.); (3) to move to England and in turn save *their* Rock & Roll. As mere dipshit goals, nos. 1 and 3 meant topically little to either of us — geez, we’d all but *buried* the Anglo-Am mainstream as even an idle, y’know, sometime hobby or whatnot — but (2) hit us firmly, instantaneously, in the breastplate.

Lester’s neurons, no recent model of health to begin with, had made the short-circuit of Lester Bangs . . . [tenor saxophonist] Lester Young . . . (latter’s nickname) Pres . . . Pres/U.S.A. per se!!!

Guffaw, guffaw — we guffawed — though I guess we could’ve gasped (or shuddered). Then: a *heavy silence*, as cosmic (or whatever) as it was awkward, filled presently by the man himself:

"Hey! I'm gonna buy some *import albums*! I'll get a *whore* I know to lend me her charge card! Cab fare too!" And he was off; no amiable nudging, no "Get the fuck out of here" could take the place of timeless vinyl hunger. Gone at last — and we gave him (in all solemn, empirical, non-jive reckoning) *six months to live*.

But of course he fooled us, by (nearly) a whole damn calendar year. Surprise, surprise: but an even bigger surprise was the extent to which he managed to actually turn things around — well, *almost* — during that extra annum, especially during its. and his. final months. Not only was he still among the living, not only did he no longer seem conspicuously earmarked for premature exit — the Lester with whom I spent a rather refreshing week in February '82 gave every indication of having already gone beyond mere survival (as an issue) and appeared, astonishingly, to be *thriving on the theme*.

In L.A. following his mother's eventually fatal stroke and staying with his 56-year-old half-brother in Studio City, he accompanied me one night to a low-stakes poker game attended by members of the Blasters, the perfect setup, you'd figure, for Lester to revert to type. But no, he just minimally fun-&- games'ed it like anyone else — no lookin' for opportunities to "be Lester," no showing off for rock-roll peers either verbally or intakewise. no diving for the evening's jugular and letting 'er rip — and after two beers (!). without so much as a grimace, he declared he'd had enough. Postgame he engaged Phil Alvin in a lively musical dialogue, but at no point did fightin' words fill the air, or were axes even *poised* for grinding. The pair agreed to exchange tapes — a wholesome friendship in the making — and next day Lester *complained* (true, true) that *reefer had been smoked*.

As the week wore on in consistent, low- key fashion. I was struck by the fuckload of inner capacities the guy was perceptibly calling on, left, right and center, to extend his defiance of Death to the domain of just plain living, capacities I hadn't caught sensory evidence of — all previously told — for more than 11 minutes total. A far cry from anything as cheaply benign as, let's say, more frequent eruptions of "Lester washes the dishes" (see obit O4), what I got to witness was kind of on the order of a *whole new Lester*, one who'd finally found a non-lethal, functionally less jagged (though in no way "benign") rhythm for his life. Engaging him in tight quarters with more open-heartedness per se than I'm sure I'd ever mustered (sharing an Edge does not always make for brotherhood-by-*numbers*. let alone by pure, unedited *inclination*), I willingly submitted to his rap/rant and bought its tenor if not its verbatim transcript; by the time he returned to New York, his mother still hanging on. I'd seen and heard a New Lester series pilot that could credibly have played — prime time — on the Pro- Life Network.

For starters, he'd learned to slow down, to proceed apace through a given experience without easy reliance on everpopular on-off switches. He'd gotten far more selective about the company he kept, seeking out, for the first time in his known adult life, social interactions stressing soulwarming interpersonal *comfort* over thrash-trigger me-you *tribulation*. A good deal less insistent upon strapping each day to an emotional chopping block (as recalled, for inst, in that old chestnut of his, "I need to be *in love!*"), he'd begun to let his life embrace emotional *motifs* of greater duration and resiliency. And, as stuff like this fed back to his theoretic apparatus, even Lester's ideas (as stated) began to display an unexpected day-to-day congruity; no longer, it seemed, would he write an anti-racist wowser for the *Village Voice* in one breath and scream, "Fuckin' niggers!" at Village Oldies the next. Lester-as-flux had had its thoroughly engaging run. and for this to give way to a "maturer" unpredictability was not the worst of possible outcomes.

Even the drastic reduction in Lester's intake of physical poisons bore little trace of on-the-wagon-or-bust — y'know, as if any day, minute, second the tension of it all would cause him to snap right back with equal vengeance — particularly with its status as but part of a whole-body package that included both eating at regular intervals and a radical *olfactory* modification: He now took *baths*. (One afternoon in '74 Nick and I met Lester at some ritzy midtown hotel. Though he'd been in the room all of an hour, the smell was like a dog had died there, and been left to rot, weeks or months before. Consequently, we vetoed his offer to call down for drinks on *Creem's* tab, suggesting, to his consternation, that any dump of a bar would be more, uh, whatever. *Many* of his heterosex liaisons had foundered on the rocks of precisely this issue.)

In terms of cultural orientation, no longer was he monomanically enslaved to rock & roll (-or-perish). For virtually the first time since the sixties he didn't *need*, burningly, brand new Big Beat LP's in his mail slot each (and every) day; the state of the Art, wobbling on a multi-year terminal gimp, no longer served as his external psychic barometer, his armband of first-person pride (or shame); having finally produced Music of his own, to severe personal specifications (regardless of the giggles it inspired in jerks like me), he no longer needed to *prove anything* with it or through it. Crucially, though some would probably like to deny it. he no longer saw Rock'em-Sock'em as a viable metaphor for his (or *any*, kindred or otherwise) state of being, viewing it as *the* all too easy — and ultimately, revoltingly, *unsatisfactory* — crystallization of (mega-numerous) blank and scattered lives. Lester's break with rock-roll mythos as his be-all/end-all of etc., which I have no doubt (had he lived) he'd've sooner rather than later made *official*, was as profound, and profoundly moving, as his break with the Myth of Lester. As one committed jackass who'd made

the same painful transition — goodbye, Rock-Automated Self! — I knew how tough a bond the chronically intermingled personal/cultural can be to crack (and my heart went right out to him).

It also warmed my cockles, considering his record in the mere civility dept., to see him relate (graciously) to his half- brother's wife, this unaffectedly pretty 21- year- old rural Mexican the macho blusterer, a stuntman by trade, had recently acquired, maritally, while on location Down South. Though she knew pun near zero English, my first sight of her she was watching some random English-language crap, while hubby rested for a shoot of the *Fall Guy* series, on the tiny TV in her fussy suburban kitchen; materially cozy for the first time in her life, she seemed lonely, disoriented, far from home. Silent and solemn, she visibly stiffened — shyly? menially? — at the intrusion of Lester, my girlfriend Irene and me. only to be put at ease by Lester *introducing us*, without missing a beat, as, well, *friends of the family*. Like it mattered to him that she feel *like* family — and thus shared in all aspects of etc. — and for a moment the loneliness left her face; she smiled broadly, shook (or at least took) our hands, went back to her tube.

But what came off as so genuine when he was dealing with *his* family, *his* friends, kind of sputtered into the ether when he tried to branch it to the family of Man. Whenever he got to talkin' Hard Humanism, which had all the earmarks of being his preoccupation of (Rock- replacement) record, he'd make these broad, lecture-ish, relatively flavorless statements which often didn't wash.

Never wholly credible 'cause once again he seemed to be *performing* — without booze/etc. but surely with a *script* — he'd say thus & such about human courage and folly that not only had an artificial ring, it tended to run in direct opposition to what had clearly been his experience. Even his word choice sounded stilted, alien, *not his own*; when he spoke of "women" he could easily have been reading straight from a column in *Cosmo*.

A lot of which suggested a Lester so hellbent on being a *good boy* once and for all that to merely work overtime cleaning up his own act was scarcely sufficient; he had to render a transpersonal commentary that made his good intentions "universal," even if the topical universality he'd taken an option on was simply the first he found it comfortable song-&-dancing a provisional connection to. There were moments when his bill of particulars made me uneasy, realizing that to intellectually *challenge* any of this would be like kicking mud on some kid's newest>truest pastime, 'specially when it was one so socially redeeming, so non-self-destructive. one which, for all intents and purposes, I basically shared with him anyway. What really *counted* was the miracle of Rock Tough Guy #1, after 15 years of

rocknroll plug-in and little else, during which he'd come to thread *that* needle upside down (and asleep), to the point (even) of smugness, flipness, pomposity, out on a goddam limb over *something else*: a neophyte at last! (I could dig it.)

Anyway, finally, on the last night of Lester's stay — which worked out as our last time together, period — we did something we'd previously never found the appropriate nexus for: trading rants (in earnest) with blank tapes a-rolling.

For something like five-six hours we went apeshit re such topics as: the sellouts & prejudices of mutual colleagues; novels and novelists; New York as (quite possibly) the coldest outpost on Emotional Earth; the usual standard rockish garbidge (plus some un- and some non-). We also hit on shrinks—we- have-known, with Lester's rap on this rooty-toot of a subject being *the* single one, from the four-and-a-half hours I've so far transcribed, which most tellingly nutshells the excruciating self-examination he had to've undertaken — and undergone — just to be sitting around discoursing as fluidly as he was, to've *transcended* whatever the fuck en route thereto:

"Like I went to a psychoanalyst, one in New York and one in Detroit, for a total of, I dunno, three-and-a-half years. I finally concluded, I mean yeah I'm insane, I've got my problems, my sicknesses are fucking *me*, yeah, I'm sure they both probably helped me, y'know, I know the last guy in New York, it's like everybody I know was totally appalled by my drinking and drugging, well like you, right, and everybody else had the same reaction, y'know, except my shrink. He'd say, 'No, that's alright.' I went out to this, he had a country retreat, a whole bunch of us would go out there on weekends. And the first time I went there like I got drunk on Friday night, and Saturday morning I got up and washed down a bottle of Romilar with a bottle of beer while sitting on a slick rock by the stream. I got this great idea for something I wanted to write, I stood up on the rock in boots like these and *whoosh*, went like that and smashed, see it, the scar on my nose? That's how I got it, smashed my face open.

"And he thought my druggin' and drinkin' was great, y'know? He said, in fact he kind of told me I'd be not as great of a writer if I gave all this stuff up. And I said, 'Yeah, but look at all these people, they rot away, they end up like self-parodies like Kerouac and Burroughs and all that sort of shit.' And he said, 'No. no, not everybody's like that.' I said, 'How could I someday be 55 years old and have to take a handful of speed to sit down at the typewriter?' Well he said, 'People do it. heh heh heh!' Well both my shrinks, especially this guy, they had real great humanist compassion and empathy and all that, but I know what both of 'em *did*, and in the long run in essence they were no good for *me*, because they were getting off on me being there. It's like

they're so bored, one housewife alter another, 'I don't love my husband, I don't know why.' Then they get someone like you or I that's actually interesting, that has ideas, and so it's fun time for 'em. I mean if I hadda follow this guy's advice I'd be *dead*, uh, pretty soon."

Hmm: one effing eery end-of-quote as, alas, all is now dust — reactively acquired caution or no. Possibly possibly possibly, *any* tonnage of prudence would inevitably have proven insufficient for the autopilot courses he was still, evidently, all too capable of flying. Or, reversing horses and carts, maybe his tortured shell was already jus' too beat-to-shit, with even a radical lessening in his scale of abuse being too little — archetypally — too late. And then there's this pharmacological biz about purified cells succumbing to doses they'd have been more than up for when poison was all they knew. (And can we ignore the Wrath of Influenza?)

Even if, to some bitter-enders, his death remains as shrouded in formal "mystery" as those of Eric Dolphy and Warren G. Harding, all-of-the-above can't help but provide a not-unlikely profile of how Lester came to die. Throw in a few more mainline Causalities (cultural: rock-roll glut, esp. coupled w/ too literal an intoxication with Kerouac, Celine, *et al*; primalpsychological: a childhood more woeful than most, his Jehovah's Witness mom — pushing 50 when she had him — mind-setting, almost singlehandedly. a chronic "inability to cope"; geographic: the Apple, even when it wasn't *absolute* Edge Central, affording him. given his makeup, scant opportunity for inner peace) and you'd easily have an *explanation* that 'd hold up in a court of his cronies/cohorts/camp followers.

But if Lester was the pawn, victim, and (indeed) fellow traveler of such easy-Aristotelian a-implies-b, he was also, in those last fitful months, a scatterer of all such shit to the winds, a man who showed his true destiny muscle by throwing *all the elements* out of on-the-head mythopoetic sync just when they threatened, conspiratorily, to reduce him to merely another Jim Morrison. Jimi Hendrix. Mr. Kerouac. Screamingly, courageously, he committed himself, as wholly (really) as possible, to a *counter*-causal gameplan which even if flawed — and accidents, y'know, *happen* — did actually manage to defuse (at least where I live & breathe) the mythic oompah of *any* time-delayed rat-trap he may subsequently (or previously) have fallen in. If there's anything almost *pleasing* about the timing, the anti-drama, of Lester's death, it's the monumental Mythic Disjuncture factors he'd set in motion were thereby — implicitly, explicitly — to forever effect.

LESTER'S (WRITERLY) LEGACY — "One of rock's most colorful characters, Bangs made his reputation as a pugnacious, participatory journalist who was not above picking fights with rock stars in pursuit of a good interview." So wrote one voice of

prevailing wisdom, Patrick Goldstein, in the May 9/82 *L.A. Times*; nothing — latter part — could be farther from the truth. If Lester (the writer) more than once battled Lou Reed into (and beyond) the wee hours of etc., it was not to *get* a story, it was to *live* a story: to encounter all the rock-related *being* his writerly credentials (as a wedge) were able to afford him (as a person)'. Nor was he in any way enthralled by the sickening spectacle of stars being stars; artists, *maybe*, but stars, *fug 'em*. When he as mere citizen found himself face-to-face with the pose, pretense, and professional guardedness of such gaudy, extraneous creatures, Lester could not (for the life of him) deal with such crap but to cut right through and speak, directly, to the mere citizen in *them*, or (failing that) force the situation into functional self-destruct — *before* the fact of anything so dispassionate as actually "writing it up."

That his eventual write-ups tended to display utter contempt for the *entire* food chain of music-corporate life, often biting, intentionally, a grimy hand that could not've been more willing — his mighty Credentials & all — to feed him, heck, *fatten* him, was but half the take-no-shit of Lester's essential *statement* as a writer de rock; forcefeeding the stuff, *his* stuff, the stuff-as-writ, to the only marginally less corporate (or grimy) running dogs of rockwrite publishing was at least as pugnacious a gesture of this-is-what-I-am/this-is-what-I-do/take-it-or-be-fucked. Since the extent of his *success* in shoving it down so many otherwise unyielding editorial throats may have had less to do with *his* willful intent than theirs — camouflage, for inst, for their being life-deep in major-label record company pockets — its significance at this juncture is, at most, merely ironic; the reciprocal *influence*, in any event, of his ease at getting published upon subsequent moments of raw critical-expressive spew was procedurally nil. In fact, what may most enduringly *matter* about Lester's approach to his chosen profession, way ahead of dandy journalistic touchstones — "courage," "integrity," "pride in craft" — that he ate for breakfast like so much broken glass (but which, really, you can still get from Nat Hentoff and Howard Cosell), is the "anti-professional," forcibly non-dehumanized *square-one struggle* he by design submitted to — and could not, with any kernel of his humanity, avoid — in order to pump out critical prose of any scale of note. (Pugnacity with form; with ritual creative context; even — especially — with roleplaying writerly/critical *self*.)

That he was oftentimes a great writer/critic, so-called, was but icing on the cake. That scant few others, on the hottest days of their lives, have even approached him — or particularly cared to, considering the requisite gravity and passion of the *chore* he'd set — probably says as much about their investment in lesser quals of cake as it does about the relative inadequacy of their writerly follow-through. Rockwriting is, and nearly always has been, the trade of simps, wimps, displaced machos, brats and saps; of, in Lester's own words, "ass-kissers of the ruling class"; of fuddy-duddy

archivists with cobwebs on their specs; of pathetic idealizers of a *lost youth* no one has ever (even approximately) experienced or possessed; of sycophantic apologists for chi-chi trends, musical and extramusical alike, without which (so they've always claimed) "rock is dead"; of binary yes/no cheeses with the cognitive wherewithal of vinyl, shrinkwrap, the physical column- inch. Rockwritin' Lester, like anyone else in the trade, was certainly each of these things from time to time, though (probably) none of 'em, singly or in tandem, for longer than the odd *off* review. Sadly, though his untradelike comportment surely *tantalized* mere tradefolk while he lived — at least in terms of Style — and even begat a not-half-bad (early-'70s) clone in "Metal Mike" Saunders, his actual abiding sway among such clowns, beyond the occasional liftable riff, was — as it continues to be — infinitesimal.

Finally: the twin silly questions (1) where a still-living Lester might hypothetically've *taken it* (i.e., beyond the rockwrite fishpond) and (2) what such imaginary newstuff could/would conceivably've *meant* to his basic audience. Second one first. Okay, that Lester's rockstuff generally read so hot as personal testimony is one thing; for it to have been perceived by so many as being eminently, genuinely *about something* — something rather specific, in fact something "rear" — is something else. When you get down to it, the gospel of Lester's radical about-ness rested largely on a big hunk of readerly *illusion*, the illusion of a functional one-on-one between the guy's fertile imaginings and the psychic infrastructure of rock & roll as dealt; there could be harsh discordance, of course, but as long as a firm *relationship* could (for whatever readerly vested interest) be consistently inferred between Lester's mindgames and rock's g-g-games per se, you at least had the stamp of a viable — if totally simulated — one-on-one. But, really/truly, while Lester's psychic playground may surely have been one drastically twisted maze, its actual correspondence (sympathetic, hostile, whatever) to rock's own labyrinth, one so airtight and dank as to make his seem like wide open etc., was far too often naught but a matter of *readerly convenience*. Everyone loves a cipher, a living/breathing anagram or two. even some — hey — with flaws more rampant than Lester's, but for the man's writerly *service* to've been gauged (almost solely) vis-a-vis his reliability as a stand-in cipher-of- x, y'know for readerfolk too lame — or lazy — to suss out x themselves, is the real tragedy of the trip, particularly when the first-&-final glue of most folks' attachment to his writing was never much more than their own desperate attachment to an x they could, and should, have been accessing more independently (and less desperately) to begin with.

So, anyway, here's the rub. Had Lester lived long enough to both sever his own desperate rock connection — *officially*, in sheets read by his fuckheaded fans, simply by writing *other stuff* — and, furthermore, to back it up with an equally official rejection of the Fount of Neurosis from which he'd sung its tune (and they'd

listened), it ain't really much of a longshot to imagine him losing a huge percent of the fuckheads — certainly the most gung-ho among 'em — in, well, no time flat. And, c'mon, how much of an immediate, uh, *new* audience was he likely to yank in writing up (as he insisted he would) such transcendently pivotal mere-humanistic trifles as the dearth of love (as we know it) in scene X or Y . . . how this set of new-age culture jerks uses that set of new-age culture jerks as props in regards to bluh . . . New York editors who pull rank (pshaw!) along *collegiate* lines [a hard-hitting exposé] . . . or, I dunno, something about shams and follies in clothes and/or grooming?

Plus, well, though, um — (even *if*) — then again: *Aside* from loss of ad hominem authority due to the fickle scumbait nature of the pop-world Beast, *aside* from the fact that many of his generic partisans would prob'ly now be targeted, topically and even personally, in scathing printed-page rants, *aside* from the limited run such goulash (Sensitive Ties His Laces, w/ Brass Knucks & Footnotes) has ever had — hey — *can* ever/*will* ever have . . . aside, aside, aside — the most glaring *fact* fact is how few times, as of his death, he'd as yet even *aspired* to the heights (or whats) or non-rock journalism. Four-five-six, some number like that, in the *Voice* and wherever else, all of 'em still pretty much rockwriterly appendices to the rockwrite "adventure," meaning he had a good ways to go before he'd've got the wings/chops/legs for a total-pulp plunge (or at least a regular shift) at full oldtime capacity (but with newtime thrust and content). Which would've been no fall from grace no matter how you scope it — give the boy time (for fuck sake) to stumble and bumble and *get it right* — but how would any possible Lester have *dealt with* a (previously amenable) shithook book co. like Delilah telling him *not now, sonny* when he handed 'em a ream of copy on (let's imagine) friends who're fuckups? Personal *persona* limelight Lester had learned to live without — but *writeperson* limelight? (It would not've been easy.)

Okay, he's dead. All this brand new grief and hardship never befell him; never will. But words on pages remain: What is *their* lot? Lester's standard fare was so paradigmatically "of the moment" that he was *the* rockmag shootist. But books of the stuff? Nah; it's kind of nebulous how even his best mag outings will wear when inevitably (??) anthologized. For someone so public in his orientation, both as input and output, he was — don't laugh or even smirk — one of rock's more precious and fragile "private moments." Private moments you can always *document* — coercively, of course — but try and play 'em back and. well . . . we'll all see, I reckon.

LESTER LEAPS IN — Y'all know all by now how Lester leapt *out* of New York; lemme just finish with how he leapt *in*. His first night in town, just a visit, fall '72, he stayed with me and my girlfriend Roni, West Village, 104 Perry St., apt. 4. Arriving semi-direct from JFK, he split pretty quick for the nearest grocer, returning with three six-

packs of Colt 45. What he did for the next day and a half — *all* he did — was wade through 18 *big* ones, half quarts, as follows: start can, drink fast, get tired; fall out, dropping remainder; awaken following can's impact with floor; stagger to fridge for fresh one; repeat cycle. What he mumbled or muttered during any of the 18 *pre*-fallout phases I simply *do not recall*.

So like hey y'know wo hey hey wo-wo *hey*, OLD SPORT: love ya, hope I didn't cramp yer style, g'bye.

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Best Of

Gonzo San Diego visitor studies baseball caps, shark's tooth, postcards, placemat

Tourist trash, tourist treasures

Author

Richard Meltzer

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Cover Stories



"See the marketplace in old Algiers," sang Jo Stafford quite clearly in the summer of 1951 or '52, "Send me photographs and souvenirs," but I heard it funny. (Kids' ears are like that.) I heard it and I heard it but it always came out *silvernirs*...silver...tokens of not only interest, even intrigue, but shimmer—and possibly worth. When my

father set me straight I thought, well, Okay. It doesn't play, but I can live with it. By the summer of '62, when the Duprees released the great rock version, I heard better. I knew better. "You Belong to Me," with or without the silver, was a song about *property and remembrance*.



Likewise, moreover, I thought for years that mementos were momentos, souvenirs of not so much place as time, and that keepsakes were only items kept, not given. All of which might suggest — aside from that I am one dim dummy — there is something elusive about the concept.



There is nothing elusive about the concept. What's elusive, or might be, is the items. Finding 'em. Items of definitive — designated — official or de facto — souvenirhood.

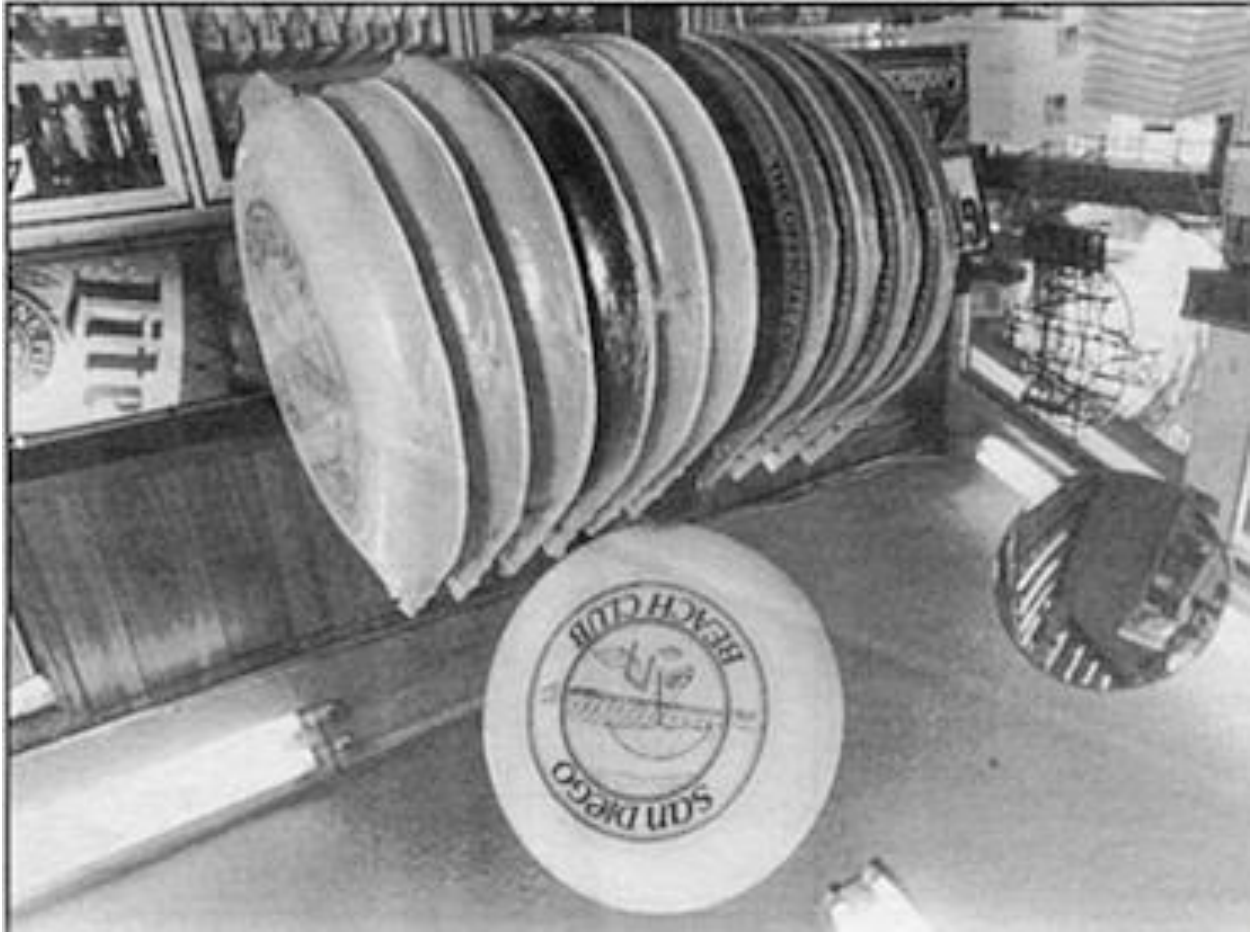
Finding and accepting them, that is. Allowing their tawdry (rhymes with "Audrey") presence in your car and/or home; letting their cooties crawl and wash over you. Unless you're a kid, of course — or a tourist. Well I ain't playing no kid, no sir — not for literature, journalism, rent money — but OK, let's play tourist. From Pacific Beach to Del Mar, let's say, up along the coast — give me 100, 200 bucks expenses — I'll tour.

And see what we shall see. And freely — openly — tolerantly acquire.

Acquired:



Baseball cap, Del Mar. One-size-fits-all, with adjustable red plastic snap band. White “commodore” type braid along the front, as synthetic as the day is wrong. Cap itself synthetic, mostly red, with royal and cerulean blue palms and fronds, a monochromatic blue bird-of-paradise, and indigo sailboats on reddish seas at sunset (or sunrise) with some yellow/orange/blue sea-level clouds as backdrop. White script-lettered “Del Mar” stencil-sprayed midway up frontal portion (over upside down sailboat) in that “furry” kind of fabric paint — you can see under it. And imagine the same basic hat being used for Hawaii, or Santa Monica, or Bali, or even Bangladesh, where in fact it was made by (or for) the Mohr’s company (red logo: “M” as a mountain).



"Are you gonna wear it," I was asked, "or do you need a bag?" "Bag it...it's a gift."

Oversize T-shirt, La Jolla. I go into this frou-frou but casual call-it-a-boutique, start eyeing the shirts, haven't even touched 'em, when this motormouth accosts me: "They're all incredible! — original art! — signed by the artist! — every one unique!" What he's babbling about is this rack of xtra-large T-shirts, 50% cotton/50% polyester — enormous white T's with cartoons. On each, a hand-drawn boy and girl — man and woman — with noseless "Have a nice day" smiles, sandals, conspicuous navels, and four-finger waving hands stand arm in arm beside a waist-high sign proclaiming: LA JOLLA. What makes these shirts mildly appealing, or would if one were susceptible to such shuck, is the fact that each has a colorful pair of extraneous cut fabrics sewn onto the persons of the boy and the girl: bathing suits. Jack. (How clever, how cute-'til-you-puke: while *you* wear the garment, *they* wear garments too.) Every one different.



Tourist Trash, Tourist Treasures

by Richard Mellzer

See the marketplace in old Algiers," sang Jo Stafford quite clearly in the summer of 1931 or '52. "Send me photographs and souvenirs," but I heard it funny. (Kids' ears are like that.) I heard it and I heard it but it always came out silverware, silver, tokens of not only interest, even intrigue, but shimmer — and possibly worth. When my father set me straight I thought, well, Okay. It doesn't play, but I can live with it. By the summer of '62, when the Duprees released the great rock version, I heard better, I knew better. "You Belong to Me," with or without the silver, was a song about property and romance.

(continued on page 18)

Finally I pick one — "An excellent choice," says herr motorman. Girl's suit (matching top and bottom): tropical fish and seaweed on a navy background. His (baggy boxers): outlined varicolored doll faces (clown faces?), wall-to-wall, leg to leg, to similar overall effect as that of those in James Ensor's *The Entry of Christ into Brussels*.

"Have a nice day." Why, fuck you too.

Petrified shark's tooth, Pacific Beach. "Own a piece of the past — how did the prehistoric shark's tooth get in the bottle?"

I don't know, truly I don't (nor do I give a flying fugging hoot on the moon). Bottle (glass) is 13/16" in diameter by 1-7/8", cork 1/4" diameter by 1/2", with the blue machine-painted inscription: PREHISTORIC SHARK TOOTH (w/ shark in silhouette). Tooth is grey-black to black, approximately 1/2" from root to tip, 5/8" wide; sticks to inside of bottle when bottle rests on side for any prolonged period.

Sponsored

Ball marker and golf hat, Torrey Pines. Marker is circular polished wood, exactly the diameter of a dime (tho slightly thicker), with 5/16" perpendicular protrusion in back. "Torrey Pines" in green with windswept T.P. tree logo: not a pine — or is it? — what is it?...must be a pine. Uses other than ball marking: bug squasher, garlic press (quarter-clove at a time), replacement eye for a doll or teddy bear, ring holder (one ring max.), poking holes in the skin of fruits so they get rotten quicker, blinding pigeons and dogs, etc., etc.

Hat: durable-looking coarse-woven light brown straw whatsit by Kangol Design. "Torrey Pines" in silver embroidered letters below dark green/light green tree logo on 2- 1/8"-wide red polyester band. A one-size-fits-all that actually fits me, no mean feat — I take a large medium, or a small large — thanks to one fantastic elastic white inner band. I will wear it with pride until I die.

Bottled condom key ring. Pacific Beach, Jack Condom — Old No. 69: parody of a Jack Daniel's label. Pint-proportioned bottle consists of identical plastic halves, 3-3/4" from base to nozzle, 1-7/16" wide (made in Hong Kong), joined at the nozzle by sturdy 1" metal ring. Condom itself cannot be removed, or significantly examined, without breaking the plastic or snapping the metal triangle which joins the halves and binds them to the ring...okay, let's break.

Freeing: wrapped, rolled (and apparently lubricated) pecker balloon by Prime Assorted Colors — mine is yellow — Ansell Incorporated, Dothan, Alabama. Expiration: !2/97...plenty of time to try it out.

A more timely generic beach curio, perhaps, than a bottled bygone fish tooth.

La Jolla Cove place mat. Plastic-coated, washable, 11-7/8" X 17-1/4". No mountains, no prairie, but two-three inches of photographic ocean white with foam. On the beach sit, lie or stand 40 Caucasians of various ages, four with caps or hats, all hut

one without a shirt, but none totally nude, none eating, drinking or playing ball. Up the hill are another 18, no caps or hats, only two without shirts, otherwise ditto. Also on the hill stand a pair of light stanchions and a Torrey pine, or Monterey pine—whatever the hell it is. The sky is a cloudless blue, the ocean (foreground) snot-green with a touch of blue, (background) the exact hue, tint and chroma of Aqua Velva. Out at sea, the wake (left to right) of a single powerboat is seen, but no sails, masts or plesiosauruses. Only visible umbrella is in a closed position. In mid-foreground right, a rock formation resembles a leatherback turtle.

A lone tall palm ascends from the beach, dryish fronds overlapping the pine tree. From beyond upper frame right, seven or eight leaves of a mystery tree, species unknown, intrude just below the horizon line. At foreground left, 91 or 92 white daisies may be counted. On the side of the hill, uncountably many yellow flowers, too small to i.d., and also some white. Judging from the size of shadows, it would appear to be (rough guess) 2 or 3 PM. No dogs. Down from the hill, a concrete staircase w/ concrete railing, its final 18 steps visible. Two rectangular signs on poles, one on the beach, one up the hill, text side of neither facing the camera.

Most interesting alien object: pinkish orange wooden chair, precariously close to edge of the massive central rock which takes up at least 15% of the overall image.

Around the whole thing, a royal blue and white frame. Reverse side: beige/brown "Formica" pattern. Distributed by Road Runner Card Co., San Diego. Logo: a black & white roadrunner, running left. Purchased in Pacific Beach.

Tree branch from the Salk Institute. Make that a felled tree branch. I would not take a live branch for a trophy. Not even a eucalyptus. Which this wasn't anyway. Let's back it up.

All the fuss about their remodeling Salk. Those that're remodeling. "The second most beautiful building in America," i.e., after Wright's Fallingwater — well I dunno 'bout that, lots of weather-beat wood and stone that looks like concrete but ain't even: actual stone. A very dressed – down architectural wonder. First time I been there and I look around, check the fog, check the famous murdered eucalyptuses. Poor eucs. But there's one don't look like a euc, don't smell like a euc., so I ask this guy who says: "That, sir, is a eucalyptus" — wrong! But whuddo / know, hey — you know I don't know trees — so I yank off a branch and head for the nearest tree book.

Mildred Bell Lewis's Interesting Trees of California. Well, it's not a euc...not a willow...not a yew...a dawn redwood? No, a COAST REDW(X)D. "Native to the 'fog belt' of coastal California, from sea level to 900 meters." Sound possible? For a second

opinion, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Trees*, Herbert Edlin, ed. Check the pitcher. Seems like it. Ain't life funny?

Plastic cherry (or onion) spears. "Across from Del Mar Race Track," boasts the red and blue business card of Red Tracton's Restaurant — "Proudly serving Eastern prime beef." With metal jockey sculptures out front and Leroy Neiman horse prints (paintings?) on the walls within, you'd figure, well...something. Souvenirwise, however, there are no matchbooks, no napkins no coasters — nothing to beg, borrow or steal — with a horse or track motif...what to snatch?

After much consternation, I settle on a couple of plastic spears, one yellow, one blue, 3-1/2" X 1/16" X 1/32", used (presumably) in subduing maraschino cherries for mixed drinks. Or onions. Or halves of sandwiches. There's a good point on 'em. Every time I stab something I will think, Red Tracton's, no horse*..no track...no tap beer — stab, poke — take THAT, Red — you asshole.

Complimentary tea and non-dairy creamer. "Take tea and see" — remember that? Rallying cry of the nefarious tea (vs. coffee) campaign of the early fifties. Well I took tea and c.: creamer. Upon checkout from a night at SeaCoast Suites, Pacific Beach. Stayed there. One block from the ocean...rather small room...bed takes up between 2/3 and 3/4 of the space... view of not much...single trashcan, dollhouse size, in the crapper...no local phone book...no complimentary postcard-antiseptic tho, v. clean (no bugs, either flying or crawling). And tea, thanks. And c.

Tea (individually wrapped Lipton flo-thru): fine; dandy; the "brisk" tea; caffeine — some; no gunk or residue left in cup. Creamer (no brand name; contains: corn syrup solids, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, sodium caseinate, sodium silico aluminate, dipotassium phosphate, monoglycerides, sodium tripolyphosphate, diacetyl tartaric acid ester of mono and diglycerides, artificial flavor, artificial colors): I wouldn't rub it on a rat.

Del Mar racing postcard. They're off: nine horses entered, number 5 seems to have broken from the gate. Hundreds of spectators in frame, at least 60% clad in white, only 31 with caps or hats. "Racing at Del Mar" — lemon yellow pseudo-script (all letters separate) on burnt sienna. Text on reverse (sepia on white): "Exciting thoroughbred racing can be enjoyed at its best at beautiful Del Mar Track." Road Runner Card Co., printed in Australia by Colorscans. In stamp-goes-here space: "Colorscans North America" around globe w/ select land masses, among which neither North America nor Australia can be distinguished. Purchased in La Jolla.

Free save-the-manatee pamphlets. “Attention: Swimmers, Boaters, Divers” (subtitle: “Guidelines for Protecting Manatees”) and “Manatees: Miss Her Now or Miss Her Forever” (subtitle: “A Guide for Boating, Diving and Snorkeling”), published and distributed, respectively, by the Florida Power & Light Company and the Florida Department of Natural Resources. “It is unlawful,” says the former, “for any person, at any time, intentionally or negligently, to annoy, molest, harass, or disturb any manatee.” “Wear polarized glasses while operating a boat,” advises the latter. “Polarized lenses make it much easier to see the ‘swirling* that occurs when a manatee surfaces for air.” Cuddliest li’l manatee depictions you would ever care to see on the pages of each. I will treasure them — lemme tell ya — for another 40 seconds or possibly more.

Picked up at Diving Locker, Pacific Beach — 3000 miles from the nearest non-captive U.S. manatee.

Christian Science literature. Beating the streets of La Jolla — pounding ‘em — where to go next? Like any score-hungry tourist, I make haste for 7853 Girard Ave., home of L.J.’s Christian Science Reading Room. Open daily, 9:00–5:00, 7:00–9:00 — we’re in luck. And waiting at the door (no need to even enter): vol. 95, no. 18 of *Christian Science Sentinel*. Normally 2 bucks, to us free — wow — what a deal.

Cover story: “Forgiveness and Its Power to Heal.” Illustration: teenaged boy and girl on adjacent swings, she in matching lavender turtle-neck and socks, he in red (not burgundy) Washington Redskins sweatshirt. Has she given him herpes — or the crabs — and is asking his forgiveness? “Heal the sick — Raise the dead — Cleanse the lepers — Cast out demons”: sounds like a my-t-tall order to me.

(Why do I mock? Why do I mock?)

Promotional beer booklet. A man needs a dwink. So. While still in a reading frame, read — quick. La Jolla’s Star of India, reviewed in the window by Eleanor Widmer, who hates my guts. Favorable assessment; good. Where there’s food sometimes there is beer. Is!

Flying Horse Royal lager from Bangalore: yum. Best-tasting Indian import (qua import) I’ve sucked down yet. The best I had in India was Kingfisher, which while now imported is imported from England — bottled there. Not the same. (Like the U.S. version of Lowenbrau — yuk.) Previous best import from India was Taj Mahal. This is twice as good. Smooth, rich — like it’s loaded with B-vitamins or something. Nutritional equivalent to a whole-grain multi-grain five-dollar bread. You could go for a while not eating — just drinking Flying Horse.

And around the neck, a folded 4-page booklet, 2-1/8" X 1-3/4", dangling on a gold 7" string. Cover: maroon, white, black letters on beige; gold winged horse emerges from clouds in a circle. Inside text, meanwhile, is unreadably small...fuggit.

Souvenir of La Jolla serendipity. And? Then? *I'll have what he's having.* Heading south on Girard, I follow a baldy in a BMW. Maybe he'll stop and get a tie. Or some shoes — I could use a pair. He hangs a right at Pearl, okay, let's see...the Warehouse at Pearl and Fay. Maybe he'll buy Borah Bergman and Andrew Cyrille, *The Human Factor*, on Soul Note — I've been wanting to hear that.

But he heads for the classical section — yikes — I don't know dick about classical. Goes straight for, late in the alphabet, knows what he's lookin'...whatsit...Edgar Varese, *Arcana/Amerique/Ionisation*, Sony Classical (Pierre Boulez conducting). Heard of him; he's the guy Charlie Parker looked up, wanted to study with. Then he died (C.P.) so he never. At least now I'll know what he sounds like.

But he ain't done, he's heading for T...S...Satie...he looks, selects...Erik Satie, *Piano Works, Vol. 2 — Mystical Works*, EMI Classics (Aldo Ciccolini at the piano). Him I know from whatever it was called, in that bank commercial.

Two CD's, oboy — but no backing out — I'm really in for it.

Varese first, okay. *Ionisation*. Bombastic percussion with whistles and sirens and shit. Sounds at times like a bunch of squares at a men's group meeting, at others like the Art Ensemble of Chicago. (Or a misapplied source of Stan Kenton.) *Density 21.5* I remember was mentioned, either in the liner notes or a review, as a reference point for some Henry Threadgill thing on the second or third Air album — which I don't currently own. A flute solo, okay, makes sense. A couple-three stretches in *Octandre* sound like the theme from *Mission: Impossible*.

Satie. The bank commercial isn't on here. But everything sounds familiar anyway, and not because I've actually heard it before, it's just kind of so simple and minimal you could imagine it being a piano lesson for 6-year-olds. Or singsongish like "Frere Jacques," no, too melodic. "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"? John Coltrane's "Giant Steps"? Something routine, reliable...but not unremarkable. But definitely recurrent. What I can't compute is are these cliches per se? Cliches at the moment of invention? Cliches purposely italicized? Cliches as flashpoints of mockery? Cliches deconstructed? (Cliches at all?) I guess that's what's mystical about it. He can also sound a lot like Martin Denny or the Nairobi Trio.

That wasn't so bad.

Memento of admission of vision impairment. I'm over 45 and I can't see shit. Well, far I can see sometimes (with my blind-as-a-bat contacts), but close, no way, nohow — I haven't got the arm length to finesse it. Can't read my beer booklet, can't read the notes to my wonderful CD's. I need reading glasses something fierce, man — need 'em last Monday — last November — 1987.

In the meantime, how 'bout a magnifier? Sure. From the Nature Company, back up Girard.

4"-diameter Bausch & Lomb "Sight Savers" 2-power mutha w/6-power inset lens — lens is plastic — does glass exist anymore?

Black plastic "contoured" handle, like the handle of a hairbrush, "balanced for hours of comfortable viewing." Viewing suggestions shown: butterfly, map, 1939 silver dollar. "Everyone needs the power to see the details" — let's see some now:

"Ideally, Flying Horse should be chilled to temperatures of 8x-10xC. And, when the occasion deserves it, serve Flying Horse Royal Lager Beer. Then, sit back and drink deeply" — 's_ the only way I know. "Flying Horse Royal Lager Beer — the champagne of beers."

(They must've not heard of Miller.)

21.5 is the density of platinum. Varese's piece of that name was composed in 1936 "at the request of Georges Barriere for the inauguration of his platinum flute."

Varese also spelled his first name "Edgard."

Vexations, written in 1895, is a theme and two variations Satie wished to have repeated 840 times. The first complete performance was carried out in 1963 "on John Cage's initiative with the assistance of ten pianists taking turns at the keyboard for nineteen hours nonstop." (CD version only 1:35.)

Heinous real estate throwaway. San Diego Portfolio, with scores of loathsome, repulsive "listings" — to wit: "SOUNDS OF THE SURF. Right On The Sand! Large decks for superb entertaining highlight this gracious 5 bedroom, 4 bath home. Located in Del Mar's unique Beach Colony. \$2,300,000." And some people find sex classifieds obscene. Haven't they heard yet that property is theft? (Found in the trash on Camino Del Mar.)

Original art price tag. Non-willfully acquired souvenir of Shelby's, La Jolla. "This delightful new restaurant," says *The Ultimate Dining Guide's* critique, is like a "home away from home" — good. I'm homesick. "You may even start your day with Eggs and Filet Mignon (\$7.95)" — I believe I will. *O.J. from concentrate...real carnation on table...biscuit ordinary (from package?)...some e-z listen station (too loud)... good potatoes & meat*, say my notes. And — what's this? — a small strip of paper slips from my notebook...

White, 4-1/2" X 3/4", w/ black boldface: "'Grand Canyon Suite I,' \$225." A centimeter (or thereabouts) of masking tape remains in one corner. Apparently it just fell in my book.

And the painting, well, lemnie see if I can 'member it (not in my notes). Principal colors: blue, purple, brown, red, pink. Style: Ameri-landscape Impressionist. I've seen worse. Two twunny-five? Well...hmm...no thanks. Tag alone is plenty for me.

UCSD: nothing. No object required. I got mementos enough, indelible mem'ries of the last time, the only time, I was there. I could remember it in my sleep.

1969, summer...a new campus then? We started down the coast, me, my girlfriend Rhonda and another couple, started in Berkeley, heading probably for somewhere in Mexico. Never really knew where we were going, just generally south, and rarely did we have anything approaching what could reasonably have been called f-f-fun. The four of us and a Great Dane — me, Rhonda and him in the back seat — for three-four miserable weeks. By the time we hit S.D. County, we were bickering all the time, fighting over where and when we were gonna eat, drink, where we're gonna sleep, and Sam the driver — who wouldn't let anyone else drive — had at least a dozen times almost got us killed (on the outside lane at Big Sur — natch — but also on straightaways and 25 mph surface streets), and nearly busted at least half as many.

A long story. I'll shorten it. We're in Oceanside, been stopped for throwing speed out the window — amphetamines — Sam threw 'em — which these cops amazingly took merely as act of littering, didn't know what, and wanted to pop us for that, and somehow we lucked our way out of it, and afterwards we just drove, kept driving, into the night, many different roads, until we came to...UCSD. And climbed in the windows of a couple dorm rooms and slept.

And in the morning Sam says, "Here's where we part company" — he wouldn't drive us to Tijuana, he wouldn't even drive us to the zoo — and there's more to the story, much more, but that's enough.

Sunburned ears. From a day of wearing the Torrey Pines hat after removing another which had more adequately covered them (sunscreen on face and neck). Not too bad, a medium pink; no immediate foreseeable cancer threat.

Penny medallion. Pacific Beach. "Make your own souvenir!

Yes, it's legal (U.S. Code 18-331)."

Two quarters and a penny go in the slot, gears turn (and turn) and the penny gets flattened like a railroad went over it — flattened and molded — yet doesn't come out hot to the touch. Oblong, not quite an ellipse, nor even radially symmetrical, pointed more at one end than the other, 1-1/2" and 3/4" at widest points.

Design: the pier, the sun, gulls; PACIFIC BEACH, SAN DIEGO, CA.; elliptical "roping" around everything. Looks like a miniature copper belt buckle. Or a wide surfboard. On the backside you can make out the ghost of Lincoln, so evidently (in my case) it got stamped reverse-side up. (There are worse things you could do with a penny.)

A keeper! Something I will safeguard and cherish 'til the weasels come home.

Wrapped toothpicks. One from Shelby's, one from Tracton's. Excellent wood and hygiene. Both 'picks 2-9/16" long, wrappers 3-1/2" X 5/16": identical. Great restaurateurial minds think alike — it is comforting to know.

Balloon ride advert. "For romantic excursions into the realms of fantasy and adventure, let us take you back to a time when you believed in dragons and fairy tales." Say what? 4" X 9" glossy postcard-style handout/mailer for A Beautiful Morning Balloon Company. Pictured: (upper frame) red/yellow/blue hot-air balloon above palm trees, (lower) 17 or 18 balloons in varying stages of ascension, hundreds of idiots standing about in their collective shadow (photos by Joseph Woods, 1987). "Join us for one of our daily flights over the coastal regions of Del Mar." Or let's not and say we did.

Did!

Seashells and driftwood. I forgot. Next time.

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Best Of

Charles Bukowski: an appreciation

Barfly

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

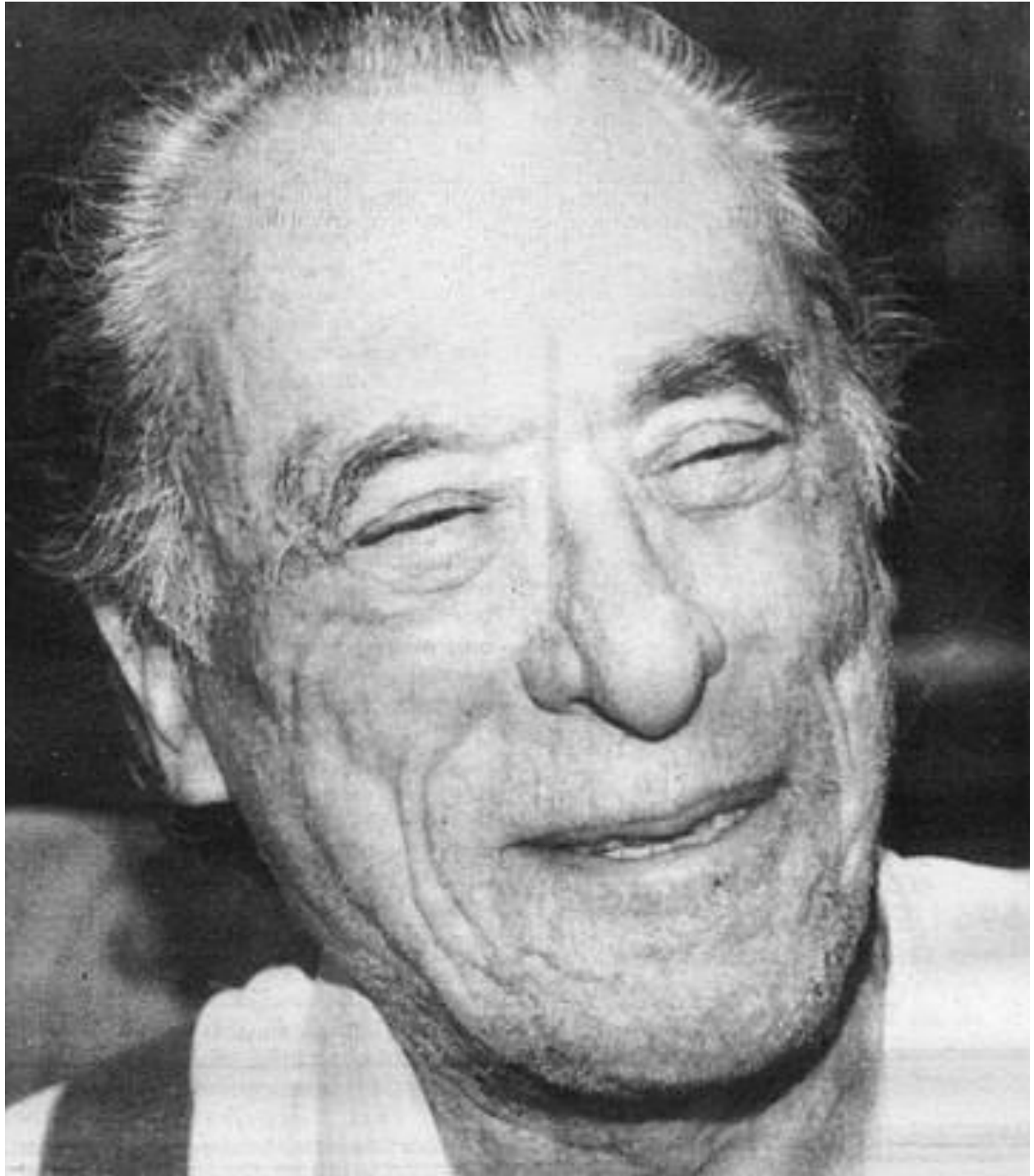
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I got up, went in, pulled down my pants, sat down, thought, fucking often has nothing to do with being "lovers" and fucking seldom has much to do with literature and literature has nothing to do with fucking except to write about it when more important things give way, and most literature is pretty fucking bad. — Charles Bukowski, "We Both Knew Him"

WE WERE NEVER FRIENDS.

I was in the same room, space or vicinity as Charles Bukowski, who died last March of leukemia or some such, five times, total.



The first time I laid eyes on him, in the early spring I think of 72, somewhere in the hills up near Griffith Park, he was carrying a jug of red table wine and a bag of groceries, dinner-plus for himself and the woman he was then seeing, the publicity director of a record company that had flown me to L.A. to write up a weepy-sensitive singer/songwriter creep. The first thing I heard him say, handing her the

groceries, opening the wine, was “Lucy, tonight I’m gonna bite off your ugly white insect of a clit.”

I could say now that I was impressed, a wide-eyed, slave-to-my-dick 26-year-old writeboy hearing it done “for real” (in “real time”) by a veteran dick-slave poet, but I wasn’t; or that I thought he was an asshole, which I did, but I thought then that most people were assholes. What I thought was, Gee, how premeditated. He’d obviously been saving and savoring the line all day. (The only other person I’d met who spoke in banner headlines was Patti Smith.)

I hadn’t read a word by the man at the time, but in retrospect I can see it was all there — a goldmine of lit-crit etcetera: the grandiloquent second-person hostility; master use of the unvarnished raw; the moment’s utterance crystallized in lucite (jello) forever; the merger of “high” (image, structure, intent) and “low”; the here-I-come-I’m-Bukowski (to the tune of “Hey, hey, we’re the Monkees”) leitmotif and calling card; the downscale populism (not everyone a king/queen but every person — especially those in “relationships” — a chump); the inseparable themes of anguish-in-pleasure, pleasure-in-anguish; the highly mannered, if “simplified,” caste (gender, class) rituals; the (perhaps ingenuous) lead-with-your-chin insistence on trouble; the live-as-you-write/write-as-you-live chalkboard equation (with chalk strokes a-grating); the matchless clarity of expression.

All there for sure, but mostly I thought, What a silly old man. Later that night, after we’d finished the wine and gone on to beer, he announced: “Now I’m gonna watch TV on purpose for the first time.” He’d been in the same room with it on, he said, but never really paid attention. Lucy had a brand new many-inch Panasonic.

First thing on was an episode of *Cannon* with William Conrad undercover as a trucker. When the of beached whale showed some mettle in subduing a runaway 18-wheeler, Bukowski poured on the sarcasm: “What a man!” At hour’s end, after tubbo blew his second shot at a frowzy old flame: “You’re better off without her.” Next up, right-wing talk beast George Putnam, whom Buk let really have it: “Go ahead — pick on the poor goddam Commies.” Around 1:00 or 2:00, when the film started skipping on *I Shot Jesse James* with John Ireland (was the projectionist asleep?): “See! — they haven’t got the technology down yet.” A funny old blustery guy. He reminded me of my grandmother talking to and at the family’s first TV in 1950, but more blustery. Four years later I went to the fights with him.

If you felt like it, it wouldn't be too big a cheat to divide Bukowski's published works into three basic categories: poems, novels, short stories. I mean *anybody's* writing could be split that way — big deal — anybody with substantial stacks of each, but with Mr. B the distinctions were matters of more than formal deviation. Different types of work meant vastly different ways of working.

The poems were essentially all written in one sitting, a few at a time — day, night — whatever. A verbatim record of what he was then and there thinking, beer at his side, pecking away. At the opposite end are the novels, representing commitment to the long haul, willful acts of episodic fiction over several months at least (with life as ongoingly lived filtered out, kept at bay, not directly intruding). The stories, requiring multiple (or at least more prolonged) unit sittings, fall between quick fix and long haul, closer to the former in scale and duration of narrative (usually a single experience), to the latter in compositional import and fuss. Neither fish nor fowl, they tend to be the glibbest of his outings, though never as glib as — and always more real, more alive, than — the stories of Raymond Carver, for instance.

The poems, at best, are the high point of his art. At worst (and a lot, possibly even most, of his published verse is toss-off and filler), they're still never as bad, never make you wince a tenth as much, as the average off poem by a John Ashberry, a John Berryman, a Stephen Spender. If anything, they're a deconstruction of all that, never aspiring to heights of "poetic" ado, stretching for metaphoric interlock, burdening sight lines with the slop of transcendence or arcania or even wit for wit sake. Or if not never, almost.

Bukowski the poet speaks quite like a normal human being, or a normal ornery old fuck with a standard vocabulary and an axe to grind. His poetic scribblings read easy, which is to say they read like prose, because virtually they are — prose with a high count of white space, a minimum of fat. (The opposite of Jack Kerouac, whose most poetic moments are in his designated prose, Bukowski's finest prose is in his poems.) This is poetry at its least daunting, about which Lester Bangs once wrote, "He says things that are actually not that easy to say, in speech or in print, but especially in print — it's not the tradition. But once said, because it all *reads* so easy, it's as though they've always been said — they smell universal."

The Ring Record Book says 8/7/76, so that's the date it was: Danny "Little Red" Lopez vs. Art Hafey, L.A. Forum. Elimination match for the WBC featherweight title. Winner gets a shot at champion David "Poison" Kotey in Ghana. I had a couple tickets, so I called Bukowski. Sure, why not, it's free, I'm driving, he'll go.

At his place on Carlton Way in Hollywood I got to see the “setup.” How the Great Writer writes. In his typewriter, some old black manual, sat an unfinished page, prose, single-spaced. “Not double? There’s no room for corrections.”

“No corrections. What I write is perfect.” On the floor beside his desk were many days’/nights’ worth of empty beers; on the wall, a huge spider web. When I try to read the prose, “Here, look at this” — he hands me a scrapbook.

Page after page of women’s photos, many of them captioned. “You get older, you think it might get easier, it doesn’t. The hangovers get tougher, the heartache gets tougher.” He directs me to a recent entry, a posed pic of a leggy blond, younger than me, with the inscription “Whoa, sailor!” “She tore my *guts* out.” A brief pause. “They all do.”

In the car I unbag the six-pack I bought for the occasion, hand him a Lucky Lager. “Lucky! What piss.” He tilts the bottle at an outlandish angle, more vertical than Dizzy Gillespie’s custom-bent trumpet, downs half of it. “The things they tell you. Shit. She had a cunt the size of this window...” — he leans out, doesn’t finish the thought. “Whudda you think of James M. Cain?” I ask, apropos of everything and nothing. “Cain? Listen, kid, you should be reading Dostoyevski. Knut Hamsun. At least Celine.” He finished his Lucky, slammed it behind the seat — smash — I hand him another.

During prelims, this gruff muh-fuh showed a decided compassion for losers — “C’mon ref, stop it, the kid’s helpless” — very touching, actually. When I noted there were no heavyweights on the bill, nobody in fact above welterweight, he grumbled, “Heavyweights are just big salamis,” a characterization I’ll never forget. Before the main event had started, many beers were consumed by us both.

Against journeyman Hafey (from New Glasgow, Nova Scotia), the on-again/off-again Lopez had the advantage in height, reach, punch, aggressiveness and savvy. And, though it really wasn’t tested, heart as well. Hafey showed none. All he did was stand up and get pounded round after round, never getting inside Lopez’s reach, never really trying. “C’mon, Hafey,” yelled Bukowski more than once, “make believe he’s your mother-in-law.” The advice unheeded, Hafey was TKOed in 7. “Boxing is the last bastion of courage,” commented his advisor. You bet.

THE USES AND ABUSES OF BUKOWSKI — In 1987, spending a week with Roger Hedgecock on a dumb piece for this sheet, I decided at one point to spring some

Bukowski on him, see how he'd react. Like here was this guy ranting about American illiteracy and how we gotta keep current with our arts and such B.S., a public figure one of whose frigging poses was I-read-therefore-I-am, and he hadn't read Bukowski, hadn't even heard of him. This American author translated into 17 languages — an icon in Europe but a mere cult figure in the goddam U!S!A! — deserving therefore of elevation to who knows what — right up Roger's alley. And I also figured, well, the *content* of Bukowski might — heh heh — be to his liking. Give him a treat. He's a two-fisted reader, he can handle a novel; I'll get him a novel.

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Of the four Bukowski novels then in print, *Post Office* and *Factotum* seemed a tad too working-class for Roger — they had their sex scenes, but the sex scenes weren't foreground, lousy jobs were — leaving *Women* and *Ham on Rye*. The former, the format of which is *I fucked this one, then I fucked that one, then I fucked this other one, then I—* you get the picture — is, truly, honestly, a not-half-bad grocery list of weeny wettings, one of the few novels that is virtually nothing but that flat-out *works*. The latter novel, probably Bukowski's greatest, his closest to a minor masterpiece, and one of *the* great '30s/'40s L.A. novels (set then, written at the turn of the '80s), is a stroll down the memory lane of worthless adolescence — bad skin in high school — *very* bad skin, the remnants of which (see any photo) were still with him, the rationale, if he needed one, for later needing/wanting to fuck 'em all (bad skin entitles you) — which seemed a little close to home in the case of one ex-mayor — would he think I was mocking?

So I picked up a copy of *Women* and gave it to him the night of this rock trivia board game we were playing to round out my piece. He flips a page, fixes eyes on a cussword or two, mock-smiles, lays it down beside the salsa, uses it as a deck for corn chips. In ten minutes the cover has three large irregular grease stains. His wife walks in, what's this? — the title intrigues her — "Oh, he's one of our great unsung authors. When I'm done you can...." She opens and studies it. Her eyes goggle. Drops it back on the table, exits. Mr. Reverence-for-Lit resumes greasing. By game's end there's more grease than cover.

gunned down outside the Seaside Motel

I stand looking at the live lobster in a fishshop on the Redondo

Beach pier the redhead gone to torture other males

it's raining again it's raining again and again som
etimes I think of Bogart and I don't like Bogart an
y more kuv stuff mox out — when you get a little mon
ey in the bank you can write down anything on the p
age call it Art and pull the chain gunned down in a
fishmarket the lobsters you see they get caught lik
e we get caught.

—“Kuv Stuff Mox Out”

Many drunks have written and many have written drunk and many, drunk, have written from and about their drinking or tried to (*you try it: 's harder'n hell*), but few, ever, have pulled off the likes of Bukowski's "Kuv Stuff Mox Out" — wow. His greatest single work? Close. A *classic*. Not the cheesy reconstructed/reconditioned content and "phenomenology" of the drunk state, of an afternoon's (night's) drinking, but a sharp-eyed/dull-eyed/no-eyed blank-slate transcript of the cheesy, bleary details, *during*, present tense, real time, real *writer's* time, at the typewriter: write, don't stop, fill page — reach right margin, carriage return, no hyphen — continue until you lose consciousness or interest. From before he had a machine with auto-return....

And yet *Barfly*, shit.

If at the time of its release in book form you counted the screenplay to *Barfly*, the film before which Bukowski was STILL a well-kept secret in his own town, his own country, as a novel, which in length and sequentiality it kind of is, it would probably have rated no higher than his worst or second worst (either better than *Factotum* — slightly — or not even). Three days or whatever in the life of a neighborhood bar — wheel out the clichés...flog 'em till they drop...draw outlines, heavy outlines, 'round everything and everybody...from effortless quasi-natural to ponderous fake...see Spot puke. Better than *Days of Wine and Roses*, certainly "darker" than *Cheers*, but what isn't?

Hey. Chances are good — likely—certain — Kerouac will soon be known to the gen’ral public as a cardboard lobby card to the crummy movie scheduled to be filmed from *On the Road*, only he’s long dead, there’s not much he can do about it. Bukowski was not only alive for *Barfly*, he wrote the damn thing. And not only did he write it, given all latitude and encouragement to write anything he fucking wanted, HE had final cut on the script as shot...fuggit.

dead fish, dead ladies, dead wars,
it does seem a miracle to see anybody alive
and now somebody on the radio is playing
a guitar very slowly and I think, yes,
he too: his fingers, his hands, his mind,
and his music goes on but it is very still
it is very quiet, and I am tired.

—“I Thought of Ships, of Armies Hanging On” (early 70s)

a woman told a man
when he got off a plane
that I was dead.
a magazine printed
the fact that I was dead
and somebody else said
that they’d heard that I

was dead, and then somebody
wrote an article and said
our Rimbaud our Villon is
dead, at the same time an old
drinking buddy published
a piece stating that I
could no longer write, a
real Judas job. they can't
wait for me to go, these
farts.

—"Up Your Yellow River" (mid '70s)

now Death is a plant growing in my mind
not much to hang on to in this early morning growling.

— "Supposedly Famous" (mid '80s)

what bargains we have made

we have

kept

and

as the dogs of the hours

close in

nothing

can be taken

from us

but our lives.

—"Victory" (late '80s)

my typewriter is

tombstone

still.

and I am reduced to bird watching.

—"8 Count" (early '90s)

A repetitive guy, this Bukowski, but one theme he really took to task — pushed to the limit—fuck the limit — was death. Mortality. His own in tandem with others', everyone's, but especially his own — the death of his ass — and the loss of his handle on writing. So often did he rehearse this biz that by the actual end, shoot, years and years before the end, it read like almost, well, a celebration of sorts, a somewhat hollow (an increasingly hollow) before-the-fact commemoration. As meat for litrachoor, for the unit poem anyway, he'd pretty much used it up.

(One thing you don't find much of in his late poems is present-tense relational anguish — current reference to anyone tearing his guts out. After years of women, women, women as "collaborators" in his art, suddenly they're absent from any reasonably full-tilt foreground play. As retold ancient history, sure, there's still enough of that stuff, but nothing with Linda, his 20-years-younger second wife, as sourcepoint. He writes not insultingly of her affection for Meher Baba, speaks of turning down the radio—no problem—'cause she's having her period. Talks pleasantly about buying her a car. Is it credible that, domestically at least, he'd become less of a crank/cuss/motherfucker? "Serenity" had somehow kicked in?

Or/and he simply chose not to alienate the one person he trusted to stick around till his last syllable of supported time? Dunno; dunno; dunno.)

The front-page obit in the *LA. Times*, a paper he never cared for, read, "Charles Bukowski Dies; Poet of L.A.'s Low-Life." Dp something like *Barfly*— and "go Hollywood" — what can you expect? And the *Hollywood* rap is not, heck, ill-taken. Might've been if he hadn't followed the movie with a novel about its making, Hollywood, easily his shallowest, breeziest, least *interesting*. A typical (really) piece of tinseltown fluff. (Apprentice writers from Squodunk come closer to "nailing" the subject.) Hang out with Sean Penn and Madonna, fine, but this book was sad to see.

After he was dead a couple minutes, his final novel, *Pulp*, was issued. In it, he encounters Lady Death, who hires him to find a not-yet-dead Louis-Ferdinand Celine. She's a good broad, though, and finally when it's *his* turn he can almost dig it. Must've known he was dying when he wrote it, and the last sentence ends: "and the blaze and the blare of yellow swept over and enveloped me." That's nice, I like it — yellow is my favorite color.

So while I'm working on this piece — life is funny— I find myself in one of his poems. "The Jackals," in *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*, p. 312 — you could look it up. Nobody leaves him alone — he wrote lots of those — and in this one three people won't leave him alone, and he has me down as one of them. Doesn't name me but it's me. Written somewhere in the late '80s.

It was at a screening for these videos he did for French TV with the man who directed *Barfly*, Barbet Schroeder. Little three-minute bursts, talking, reading, fighting with Linda, good stuff actually. The whole thing fit on two cassettes; you should rent them. Before they ran 'em Bukowski was there, we got in a conversation. And it was a conversation, back and forth, the closest I ever came to such with the guy—normal blah blah — until at one point he had enough and told me, "Give me air to breathe." Good enough.

So he goes home, how long could he have waited to put it down, the dialogue, a day, two days, a week — longer than that, why bother? — and how could he, the master of verbatim, the quick fixer, get it wrong? — but he gets it wrong. The words spoken. First of all, he gets the ending wrong, not "air to breathe" — a damn good line — but instead "get the fuck away from me." How generic. Then he has me pitch for a shitty mag I was then writing for — *Spin* — saying I said, "it's going to be better than *Rolling Stone*," which I never would've said, ha, like Woman s Day was better than *Rolling*

Stone, the *Pacific Beach Pennysaver* was better than *Rolling Stone*, anything was better than *Rolling Stone*, but *Spin*, then as now, was no bargain. What I said was this idiot, this young jerk, the trendy foppish son of Bob Guccione, had this horrible mag that was paying good money, and they wanted me to interview Bukowski, but only if he would also interview me— a thousand bucks apiece, just let the tape run — to which he said, “Sounds good to me” (not “I’ll let you know”).

That was only a small piece of the encounter. He remembered me without my having to say (as misquoted) “remember me?” — he looked at me and thought and said, “Lucy, right?” and then asked about Lucy. She was kind of a bag lady now, I told him, in a halfway house in New York for manic depressives. “That’s too bad,” he said, “she was one of the good ones.” “After you dumped her,” I said, “she told me, ‘I wouldn’t give him the ice in winter.’” “That’s a great line! I’m gonna use it.” He remembered Art Hafey.

In the poem he gets pissed at me for a piece I wrote about our trip to the fights in which I also mentioned him. Says I “attacked” him. Mostly I just quoted him — affectionately — as he jabbered away, and he *did* jabber, I’m sure we both jabbered. At the time, the next time I saw him, he merely complained that I’d confused boxing and horse racing (“Keep it up, eventually you’ll get it right, kid”), but that’s okay, you remember old things the way you wanna remember.

There’s more he gets wrong from the time of the screening, including the letter I sent later that night (in which I told him in all sincerity, all humility, that I thought of him as a brother), but that doesn’t bother me, nor my being a generic prop for his obsession with privacy (all exhibitionists need it), an easy trigger for his paranoia and self-loathing, what bothers me is his fucking up the verbatim. Missing— avoiding— the true specificity.

So the poems are not only prose, gosh, they’re fiction. Fuck me stupid, but *that* feels like a letdown.

And I can’t find, now that I’ve read everything, any use anywhere of “ice in winter.”

IN THE END, let Bukowski be this: a means, a standard, for measuring our own orneriness, our trashy fatality, our acceptance of our own weary detritus, our big stink. Who, in any end, could strive or not strive for more than that?

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Best Of

Autumn Rhythm

The joys of geezerology

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

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Geezerology: Tomorrow used to be another day, or so somebody said. It ain't no more.

Haiku #1

- where the fuck's my car?
- don't even gotta be drunk
- no more t' lose it!

Gig

Let it be known, to begin with, that I didn't ask for this, but was *asked* —

Assigned, in exchange for a sum equal to roughly a season's rent, the chore of composing a first-person account of the process of aging (heh heh), "growing old"...of copping in print to *being* old: an official GEEZER GIG.

My reluctance at first was natural. "I'm not there yet," I protested. "But I'll start taking notes, OK?" (Had an editor or two "noticed something" 'fore I did?)

Mainly, I felt, I've for damnsure got better things to do than write about my current writhe-and-squirm; more viable hoops to jump through than finding adequate voice to critique my ease or difficulty, for inst, in maintaining an unassisted daily bowel movement.

At my age, who the hell's got *time* to waste on such twaddle?

Fuh...

Inevitabilities are a pisser to sidestep. Geezerhood comes when it comes — fuggit — but just as inev' as suddenly, finally being there, now!, on the cusp of fucking dotage, my time/left measured in thimbles not buckets, was that I would be invited — cajoled — roped into writing about it.

Writers are a vain buncha geeks, y'know? We don't always wear lampshades on our heads, but we do wear hats galore, funny and straight, to get our idiot-share of attention. A sucker for such bullcrap, I have worn one guise in particular, oh, a couple hundred times at least: The Naked Writeboy.

FULL-SERVICE nakedness! Wall-to-wall INTROSPECTION! A plethora of unembellished SELF: mind! heart! body! soul! — the whole burrito!

With so tacky a calling card, it was given that I would someday be recruited, for the usual mess of pottage, to stand naked in the freezing chill of geezer sempiternity, stripped of all warming, sheltering age-coded conceits: no more *pretending* to be old, or pretending to be young (for the sake of "narrative" fun & games!)...just being old and seeing old — with tired, squinty (as opposed to merely jaded) eyes.

What a dandy ultimate USE of the subject/object self: as a touchstone of Decline and Fall...mammal...human...universal! What sort of writer would I be to decline the invitation? Of all the cheesy stories I've wanted no part of, this would appear to have my name — well, one of 'em — all over it. The No-Insulation Kid at your service!

Deeper than skin-naked, *deeper* than flesh-naked: come have a peek, see what's underneath...parts-o-me that age ain't touched, and those it's already trampled.

And hell yeah — independent of all this — I do have some copious THOUGHTS on the geezer "issue" ...microminutiae to explore and explicate...lingering personal baggage, nasty and not, to get off my chest given so cheery a context.

Hey, I may not be *quite* there yet — a frigging "senior" — but time is definitely a-wasting, pottage needs to be procured, fiber to be ingested, and other stories to be writ...let's get on with it.

You're an old fucking foop, it's finally kicking in, and things can only get worse. Dry patches dot your face. Your eyebrows grow out weird: trim them *good*, bub, or look like some German Expressionist KOOK. There are hairs on your fucking *earlobes* back so far you can't see 'em, your eyes are so bad. Watch out — take care!— or you'll chip another tooth on a bowl o' banana flakes. T for Tuesday— don't forget — the day to take out the Trash. (Or izzit Thursday?) Old friends have had enough of YOU, and you've had enough of THEM, and on days like today you can't wait for them all to be bones in the boneyard. Be patient, it'll come, and in the meantime: clothing calls.



Days

The first Bukowski title I ever noticed in a bookstore was *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over the Hills*. I was maybe 26, and it struck me as a tad corny. It wasn't that I didn't, um, appreciate the concept, the metaphor, this image of them galloping way off in a pack, leaving a mighty puff of dust, never to be seen again 'cept as tiny dots on the horizon, or that I regarded it as hokily "romantic" or some such— our common mortality in prewar cowboyflick drag — it just seemed (and in some ways still does) like hambone literary caprice: a self-designated "old man" coming on "old and wise." He was like 48 or 49 when it was published.

At 26, I didn't think much about eventually being 49. If I did at all, it was simply in arithmetic terms— that it would take me 23 years to get there. Who'd've thought it would only take 9 or 10? In life, ha, 'rithmetic works existentially. Over the hills! gone!...fuckadoodle.

Today, seven years beyond 49, it hits me like a two-by-four in the face. The days run, they don't walk, and not just the days, plural— the YEARS— but each and every 24-hour day. A couple years ago I started quantifying what a day actually felt like,

what its duration as lived existentially was, and the unit day, I surmised, was only four hours long.

It now feels about three and a half.

The compression doesn't seem so much existential anymore as corporeal. Strictly physical factors have risen to the fore. For a while I've been aware of an upswing in basic bodily fatigue...lethargy...enervation. Lately, however, it's also impacting on my ability to handle the specifics of my so-called job, one more ostensibly mental than physical, to focus on th'm or pay even semi-continuous attention. The body part of mind has taken command and thrown in the towel.

Shoot — I'm a privileged fuck who stays at home and *writes*, and *I'm* feeling this beat. If I worked on an assembly line, being 56 would be devastating.

What can you get done in three and a half hours? (Better not piss too much— that'll cut it to three.)

Lifetimes

One afternoon when I was 6 or 7, I sat around with some neighborhood kids watching a purple crayon with the paper removed float in a bowl of water. When it didn't dissolve immediately, nor after an hour or more, we figured it must be a matter of days, not hours — and only when days had *elapsed* would we know for sure.

After five days, having paid no notice for the previous four, I emptied what water was left and put the crayon, none the worse for wear, back in its box. In ensuing playtimes with these same kids I never bothered to bring it up. (I was the only scientist, mad or not, the only stickler for empirical doodah in the bunch, and I knew even then that empiricists were saps, killjoys and worse.)

A lot of things won't dissolve in *anything*, but it may take a lifetime to know for sure...

Storage batteries.

Love and loss.

Friendship and betrayal.

Forty-year-old used condoms.

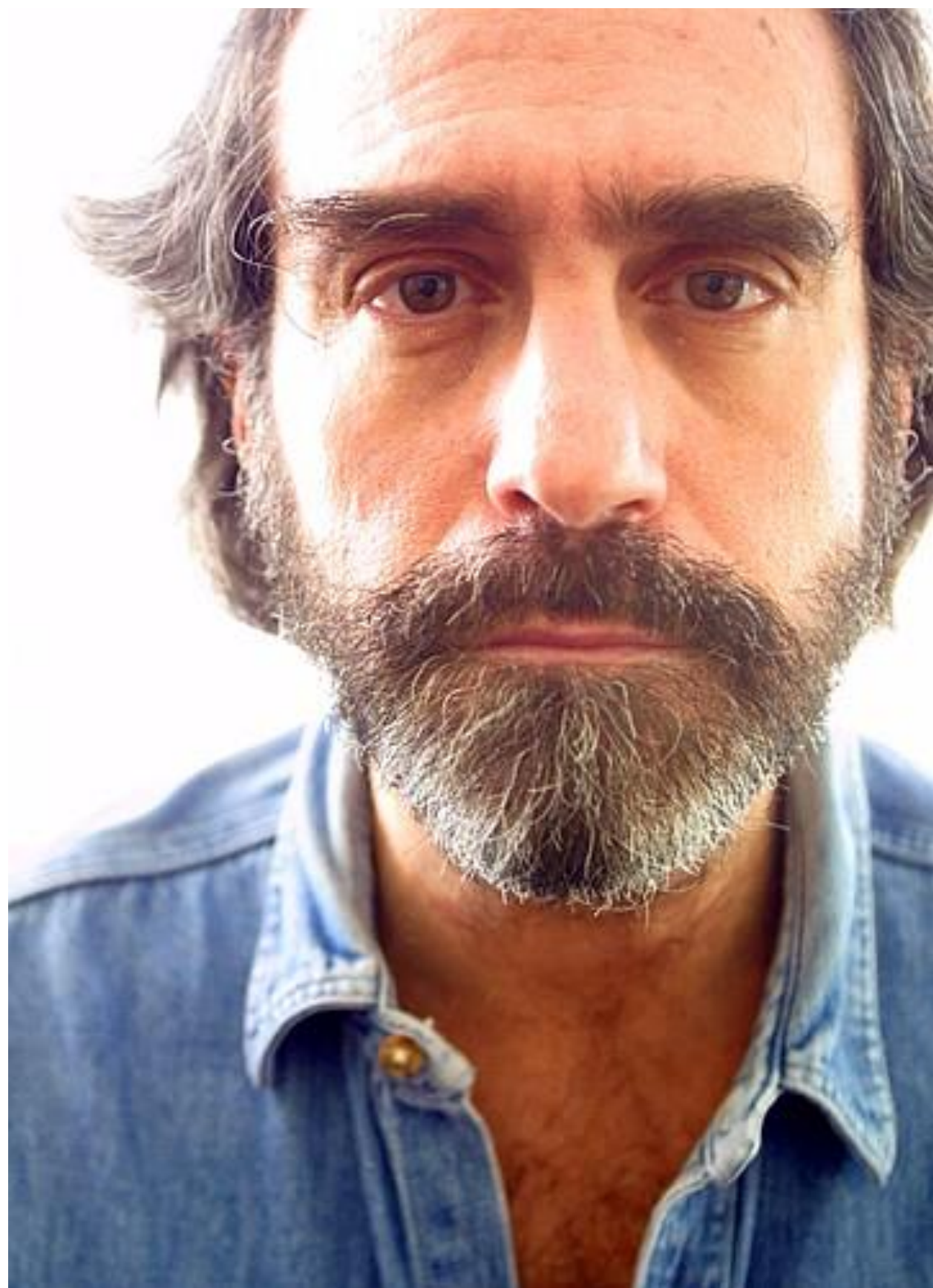
The complete works of Judith Krantz.

The concept of a perfect blowjob.

"I'm cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs" as pure prosody.

Richard Nixon's stench.

Or maybe, just maybe, they'll dissolve in EVERYTHING...it jus'takes more than a single lifetime to see.



Lives

All we get is dashed hopes,

mangled and bungled

dreams. Is this good or bad?

Tropic of Nipples

Baby!—

In my spare time, when not busy being old or jerking off or worrying about my cat, I've been working on a nice little contraption to, uh, spank you with...and for you to spank me. It's kind of a composite of things, and when I'm done it'll produce a nice little sting different from any of the whatsits we used last time.

Hey babe, I can't WAIT to sting your funky li'l geezer butt with it!

Beat Me

Much as I like grocery lists, Jim Carroll beat me to "People Who Died," so I won't even list all my friends who are dead.

Geezerology

Every day, rain or shine, you see them, chugging down the avenoo — paunchy, stoopy, prune-faced, droopy, drooly — what a scene! Two and three abreast they come, clogging sidewalks with their arthrickety tortoise-dawdle: geezers on parade!

Indeed, there is much to be amused by in the streetface of geezerhood, but nothing more amusing than the shirts, skirts, pants, hats,

jackets, socks, sneakers and umbrellas they mix and match with no regard for optical or even seasonal suitability — pinstripes w/ polka dots — team logos w/ tiedyed — purple w/ luminescent orange — Xmas plaids in June — what a scream!

Go 'head and laugh, they *are* a scream. Clowns and rock stars never dressed so funny. All your LIFE you've laughed at geezers and their clotting, made that clothing; made grievous light of their esthetic impairment; gotten your jollies at their feeble expense. Well, laugh while you can, buddy, but don't laugh too hard... 'cause someday soon the geezer will be YOU.

So listen up.

A recent survey by the Gerry Studies Department, Lewis and Bob College (Kliquot, New Hampshire), strips bare a prevalent MYTH concerning geezer clothes. The principal reason, previously overlooked, underestimated, or anyhow underreported, for how come they “dress so silly” is not so much their taste in attire is “alien or bizarre” — “f ‘r shit” — “up their ass” — as it is, simply, that these are the

ONLY DUDS GEEZERS HAVE LEFT. Inotherwords, unless they are or were “total doofs to begin with,” the report sez, chances’re

likely they once owned and wore not only sillystuff — hey, everybody needs some sillystuff — but one or more “neat”clothings relatively speaking) which *because* they were neat got worn more frequent, thus wearing ‘em OUT, leaving the geezer ultimately with his or her most *undesirable* garments, the threads they themselves cared for least — and now ‘cuz of fixed income, alzheimer’s, immobility or indifference, the hideous dregs is all they got left: their final apparel, their final “look.” If they shop anymore it’s at thrift stores, known repositories of the dregs of others live & dead, further prolonging the “cycle of dregdom.”Hey, it makes sense.

Additional factors include: too FAT to wear yer own neatstuff no mo’, dropping it from the active wardrobe, replaced by any uggle that still fits, or donning the former in uneasy “geezer defiance,”running the risk — the study further claims — of “lookin’ like an M-F’ing dipshit”; too skinny (same deal); bald or balding, in the case of formerly wearable hats and headgear, causing the ‘gear to slipflop down, perching heavily on the ears, which flap out like turkey wings (hooty HAH! — ‘scuse my laffin’... it’s just so *funny*); cataracts and blindness, requiring others to dress you, “often with sarcastic intent.” It’s not a pretty sight.

Jesus.

And what, for the merry love-o-Mike, might be DONE?

For geezers already there, very little. But for pregeezers of virtually any stripe or stroke, a series of preemptive options, while hardly immense — and rarely pleasant — presents itself for P-G perusal.

Gears, Dude

What’re those things they got in cars and watches, all sorts a machinery, they have these little protruding, those y’know they’re like spines coming off a circle, um,a

wheel...a wheel with *levers*, that's what the, uh...HOW CAN I NOT KNOWWHAT THEY'RE CALLED?!?!

Priorities

They've shortened the playing field, see. Less time also means less space. No more 80-yard passes, that's for sure, and no screen plays, no pulling guards, no double reverses...nothing calling for much in the way of finesse. No plays to waste, nor time to review strategy.

What follows each snap of the ball is much the same — in derisive '40s parlance, "three yards and a cloud of dust."

Just punch it out, hit the line, *execute* — leather helmets, no face masks. Oomp. Oof. Blppp. Kuhfmmp.

Thirty years ago, when the field was the size of Montana, and a lifetime seemed a reasonable span for pulling off something akin to literary fame & fortune, I fancied I would average a book and a half a year for all the years I saw spread before me — the approximate rate I was writing 'em at the time. If all had gone well, that would've meant 45 books over these three decades— hey, there are people who've done it!

As it stands today, I've had, I dunno, 10 or 11 books published, which still ain't too shabby. Since the last two are prob'ly the best I've ever done, it wouldn't *totally* shatter me if somehow they turned out to be the last two, period. But I imagine there *will* be more, although right now I'm not sure what shape, form or flavor any of them might conceivably take. If I live another 10-12-15 years, considering how tough it is for me to write these days, how long it takes, I'm looking at another three-four books, max. Or let's just even say three, or two...and I've GOTTA make those count — got to! got to! — not in terms of my "permanent record," my "legacy," but simply...between me and me. In some as yet unknowable way. Someday fairly soon I will have to decide: what the bleeping fuck will these books be?

Even less than 30, less than 25, the pipe dreams came fast and furious, and I actually believed, given proper exposure, that in due time I would cop a Nobel — well goodbye to all that. Goodbye to even that goodbye...what a load off my postadolescent mind.

I will certainly never be rich or anything close, but I wouldn't mind, just once, briefly, making what could pass for a middle-class income. (The guy who does my taxes

has promised me the high-sign the moment I threaten to knock on that door.) But even that is more “symbolic” than anything anymore— and of what, I can barely remember — a silly old-school notion I’m already half-set on letting go of f’rever.

Many waters under many bridges, and many letting-gos, great and small, present, past and future...

Is it necessary, for ex., even once by accident, that I ever be slim or trim again? That I regain the muscle tone I last had when I worked out regularly, oh, like 15– 16 years ago?

Between now and the final curtain, does it mean a ding dang duck dick if I comb my hair? Shower and shave more than three times a week?

How strongly does self-esteem (or is it egotism?) compel me to continue wearing contact lenses, to bother correcting my eyesight to 20–20?

Does it matter that I rarely know who won a given year’s Super Bowl? That I can no longer recite the line of succession to the heavyweight title? Would it matter if I *could*?

Does it mean shit to a shithook if I answer even one letter in 10, one e-mail in 50?

If I never again hear the Zombies’ “Is This the Dream?” — does that matter?

Does *anything* absolutely, unequivocally matter? Well yes, of course, LOVE matters, but how do you get it (how do you GET IT?) (‘specially w/out grooming or shaving or muscles) — and how do you keep it f’r longer than it takes to brew a cup of tea? If I never get it, never find it again, I reckon I’ll live...and if I die unloved, well, it’s not like I’ve NEVER LOVED, y’know? My mem’ry is still pretty good in that regard — I could tell you old girlfriend tales till you puke. If I write another novel, maybe I’ll tell 12 or 20.

Pressure Drop

A couple years ago, I had my hemorrhoids snipped, scraped, or whatever they do...something with a knife...the final surgical solution.

Though longer than I expected, as a hospital stay it wasn’t so horrible. True, they botched their own estimate of when I’d be released, which threw a mean curve at my care & feeding. Instead of salad, fruit and, I dunno, oat bran or something, they

fed me roast beef, potatoes and vanilla pudding, hotcakes and sausage — there'd been no plan drawn up for feeding me at all. Don't wanna lay on the hyperbole, but a day later, at home, it was like trying to shit a football...with severely challenged equipment...oh well.

But the stay itself, hey...I had this really pretty nurse who gave me demerol and changed my ass dressing. "This is gonna hurt," she warned, yanking the adhesive, "but nowhere as bad as bikini *waxing*" — she then apologized for being "superficial"... what a sweet, attractive person to have change your ass dressings.

Compared to what I'd envisioned, it was more like a weekend at a country club, a far cry from this scene in *Wild Angels* which had always plagued me, the one where Bruce Dern, strapped to a bed, lies dying with all these tubes in his arm. When I first saw it in the '60s, high on pot, I thought *Sheesh, I do NOT wanna die with fucking tubes in my arm.*

This wasn't anything like that, plus I learned that my blood pressure was high, but not *dangerously* high. I'd known for years it was high, and controlled it at times (in theory or practice) with exercise and diet. In any case, it was down from my previous reading, taken at an ER I dragged myself to when a spider bite got infected and blew up like a golf ball. (Maybe all the huffpuff I'd exerted in helping a bookstore guy move all his stock, loading and toting too many things myself, is what lowered it.)

Hey, I don't even know what exactly you GET from high blood pressure— heart attack? stroke? I don't know — honest! — and obviously I should; is it denial or stupidity (stubbornness?) not to know such shit at 56? But it was down, so *good*.

Sponsored

Or is it good?

Strokes I don't want— who does? But are heart attacks all bad? They come in handy sometimes — a quick end, unlike AIDS or cancer — but if they don't kill ya outright, a freaking hospital is still your destiny. Open heart butchery...quintuple bypass...sheesh—amighty.

Whatever.

But really, strapped down or not, I DON'T wanna die in a freaking hospital... hideous surroundings & lighting...mean or kind or indifferent personnel, with or without the bikini waxing...all variety of tubing in my arms. I don't!

Once you're dead you're dead, but still: why relinquish the calling of shots before that? So I should prob'ly do some homework.

Haiku #2

- periph'ral vision?
- bicycles slower than me
- run over my feet

The Shit Together

I forget the title or the publisher (HarperCollins? Random House?), but a few months ago some 25-yearold kid — 'scuse me — grownup asked me to contribute to a book he'd somehow scammed a contract for. Something on the order of "advice to the next generation." He invited me 'cause I seemed, in some conspicuous way, a representative of the previous (or pre-previous) (certainly not current) generation. Here's what I gave him:

Well, OK, let's get clear on one thing: there are no "generations." Maybe once, but no longer. Or, if you'd like, there is only one. We're all in the shit together. Period.

To cut to the chase, American Youth has never had fewer advantages — assets — resources. Not in all the time I've been around, and that includes the loathsome, despicable *pre-rock* fifties (when they banned comic books, and the *best* you could look forward to was wearing a tie every day of your life). Aside from the extra years you've got remaining, your lot is basic NOTHING. Youth is a dismal sick joke today: a consumer- demographic blip defined as maimed and *retarded*.

Quickly, you're gonna need to think for yourself (or perish!), come up with your own system (no cheating!): it's fucking compulsory.

And then, the long run. Though miracles do happen, it will in all likelihood take you longer than you anticipate— an unfair percentage of the time you've got left — to get much of anything right, to develop your own "chops," to arm yourself the way nurturing parents *hypothetically* did while you were (or at least I was) still wriggling in diapers...you have to factor in the LONG HAUL. (Writing, for inst — something I

personally wouldn't wish on a dog — will take you *fifteen* years, minimum, to even begin to get right.)

In the meantime, an early order of biz: unplug from the cyber lifeline...it's a fucking *deathline*: the bitter END of mammal life as any of us have ever known it. And encourage — by hook, crook, or outright subterfuge — everybody ELSE to unplug, y'hear?

And the next order, well, choice of poison. There's no getting very deep into this thing-called-life without the faithful assistance of whatsems that at least *partially* will also be killing you. For symptomatic relief, artificial energy, access to alternate universes, superficial kicks, whatever...there's no getting around 'em. Still, it would be hokey to impose my actual tastes on you, like you should drink, say, a lot of strong bitter ale with lots of hops — avoid red wine until a doctor orders it — whiskey will slow you down, put you to sleep — if you're of a mind to do tobacco, better to chew it...no, I won't do that. But if you're young enough, speed probably isn't such a bad idea. Heroin and the opiates, on the other hand, really aren't for kicks — they're for *heavy* grief reduction.

Speaking of which, from experience, I would say there's really only one viable program of low-tomid grief reduction (don't laugh): the blues. Equip yourself — listen to everybody from Charlie Patton to Son House to Memphis Minnie to Robert Wilkins to Robert Johnson to Elmore James and Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins, John Lee Hooker (pre-1960), Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter... all the way up to like Otis Rush, Albert Collins and, okay, Jimi Hendrix. (No Robert Cray.) (And no Stevie Ray Vaughan.) At its best, and I'm not talkin' semi-best, rock as a means to that desired end is a semireprise of the blues (never the full dose).

Buddhism? I wouldn't know, some Beats swore by it, but I've never tried it.

Speaking of Beatniks, don't read *On the Road*, not ahead of four or five other Kerouac titles: *Big Sur*, *The Subterraneans*, *Tristessa*, *The Dharma Bums*, and this one you never heard of called *Vanity of Duluoz*.

Otherwise, I dunno, see the movie *Mesa of Lost Women* — don't ask me why. (I'm sure it's rentable.)

That's it, so anyway, once again: 'tain't no generations. Any more than there are "decades." But some very deep shit. "If it ain't shit, it ain't IT" — somebody French said that. Get used to it.

Anything

How many people die having embraced and experienced one thing on their own terms for ten minutes? How many die having popped a pimple perfectly...once?

Never

A position you'll never shake me from:

Even in better possible worlds than this one, to inflict the full slimy wrath of your being (and its ongoing shadow and stand-in, your neurosis) on a living creature more vulnerable than yourself is despicable. Or let's just say unwise.

As far as I know, I've had no children. The buck stopped with me.

Vanity and Culture

Am I really and truly, by a stretch of anyone's imagining besides my own, a beatnik drunk, as I'm fond sometimes of I.D.'ing myself?

A philosopher on a barstool?

A philosopher at all?

A real drunk, even?

My buddy Nick always said if you can't drink through a hangover, you're no drunk nohow. Well I can't make it through 'em— they drop me in my tracks. Nor do I share with Bukowski fans a fondness for the designation "old drunk" (ho hum)...what a quaint cartoon. But I do get a good portion of my kicks these days in bars, where two-three afternoons a week I'll sit and swill down pints as bitter as life itself — and if that sounds corny, well, *tough*. (Hey, people!— JOY is involved.)

I'd rather have a meaningful conversation with a stranger or friend in a dark, gloomy dive than most anything in this here life, and I'd certainly rather run an idea 'round a barroom than beat it to death on paper...turn it into a fucking essay.

I don't "get ideas" from drinking, and anything I write down drunk I usually can't even read later. Ideas as experienced, as groped and sussed out *in vivo* — in life— are of far greater oompah to me than ideas "themselves," and it ain't just the dialogue — the back & forth, the alcohol-accelerated fervor — that makes suss-out in bars so appealing, it's the alc-assisted finitude and *termination*.

No, I'm not talking finite in the extended sense, y'know, like mortality, death — the end of it ALL— but finite in the here & now, as a limit-line and cutoff to further (let's call it) intellection, intelligizing. Alcohol in real time can be my-t all reet for serving you the warrant *This far is far enough*. Twenty years ago, when I still occasionally wrote drunk, what it basically meant was an end to endless revision, especially simple things like word choice. *Pick a word, damn it, and we're done!* (More "definitive" than this— why bother?) The provisionally so, the functionally so, is all you need in the way of an afternoon's so-ness...no carry-over to next week (and *phuck* eternity). Another of alc's great gifts: the GRACE to embrace a bottom line of so-ness.

And this is even *without* delivering euphoria, or nirvana, or oblivion — it ain't heroin! — without actually blunting the ideational edge: an edge you're gonna need, right?, 'cause you WANT it to keep a-knockin' at your being, to "trouble" you enough to command your ongoing, if slip-sliding, attention. Hopefully, ideally, what you get in the process is a glimmer, as well, of an idos's own attrition. Discourse and disintegration in a single dose. (Did I say I wasn't pushing one poison over all others? Pardon me.)

There was a run of maybe 20 years where I drank for very ferocious reasons, then another five where I stayed at home, wrote, and drank hardly at all, but today it's one of the calmest things I do. Where once I behaved antisocially when even halfway drunk, I now behave *socially*. Sociably. (You could ask anyone.) Which could mean I've gotten calmer...or maybe just sleepier.

Rarely do I drink at home, and the only homestuff that might be lacking in bars is my own music. My goddam collection. You're not gonna hear *New York Eye and Ear Control*, or even "Ornithology," at the Snake & Weasel. But if there's any kind of jukebox, the difference between a very specific this and a that isn't gonna be the make-or-break of a couple-three hours on a stool. No Doors, no Stones before *Black and Blue*, but lookit — *Best of George Jones!*...let's hear "Open Pit Mine."

And if there isn't a juke, and all you can reasonably expect from one of those crummy, nuthin' compilation-X tapes some barperson made is one tune in ten that even semi-works as soundtrack for the drunken moment, as expedient grist for a nuance of conversation or the random tweaking of your pliant mindset, that's a-plenty. Music in a bar is music in context, and one in ten is okey doke.

In general, the whole basic shuck of cultural "choice" has lots more resonance, both volitionally and phenomenologically, in beer joint Z than a supermarket or record store, a multiplex movie house. Even if the options are this pisswater brew versus

that (Bud and Hamm's, let's say, with no IPA in sight), or the yes/no/yes/no of *maybe* coming on to a new face down the bar you've got no chance in hell of doing the meat-dance with, not if you were the last bozo on earth...ha...at least you're eyeball to eyeball with the NOTION of getoff, in ballpark range of its being not some distant illusion (a cockamamie *abstraction*), but oboy, all the diff. in the world: a CURRENT ILLUSION.

To grab some jargon from the existentialists, with a couple-three Hamm's in your gut— hell: even Coors fucking Lights — potentiality begins to *approximate* actuality, starts behaving (in raw, wretched ways) quitelike it. 'Tain't even *virtual* getoff — rocks-off, a "real" beer buzz— of course, but something ASYMPTOTIC to it: curves stretching to languid infinity, or midway through a raingrey afternoon, can bring you *close enough*.

Attraction/repulsion, acceptance/rejection: with even 3rd-string ethyl enhancement factored in, such pairings no longer seem so either/or, so monochromatically binary...just a standard ration of flavors and colors from the same wheezy "interactive" gestalt.

Two bar-trains running. So some funkysweet babe says nuh nuh NO to your overture of whoopee, okay? Well, phoo, fie, fug a donut, but HEY!, without missing a beat, without really changing the subject (one "text" equals another), you can likewise reject Beethoven's 9th, "Be-Bop-a-Lula," all the works of D.H. Lawrence — while you're at it, THE ENTIRE WESTERN CANON — or, conversely, you can accept NOTHING, literally.

Nothing! If there's enough sweat to the experience, total wipe-out is as good as a score...it is a score. From *gimme! gimme! to nada? I like it!*...a most plausible leap...or maybe that's just me in my sleepiness. Or my geezer serenity. Or whatever.

I may fancy myself a thinker, but I never said I was smart. I was in my 50s before I realized barmaids flirt with you not 'cause they think you're cute or respect your wisdom, but to get a bigger tip. But I *always* overtip — usually a buck a beer, regardless of the act they do or don't throw my way — though it's possible I don't jack off thinking about them as much as I did before learning their cruel secret.

The culture of no choice: the fetor of a men's room urinal is the highest — and lowest — and most median in culture-hands as dealt...the universal haps. Any bar, meantime, where the TV is never off should be NAPALMED.

Geezer Date

Oh FUDGE— midnite and I'm outta Viagra! Wait...Walgreen's might be open.

Be right back — don't go 'way!— and long as I'm there, might as well get some fresh Depends, I'm durn near outta them too, and what's that one you, uh... Prevail?

Ooh babe, it tingles my SHORTHAIRES to think it: you 'n' me mixin' the mature (the ripe!) and the infantile... the autumn (the winter!) and the not-even-spring! So effing WHAT if we can't control our functions? Weewee...doodoo...you can change me and I'll change you!

Oh darlin', let's really make a mess!

From R.D. to U.S.G.

Ten years ago, I looked like Robert De Niro, the *young* Robert De Niro. I now look like Ulysses S.Grant.

Models (1)

My cat. Who is dying. Or not. Can't be sure.

For the time being, living.

He's 17 and his kidneys are shot and his thyroid is fucked and he's got the beginnings (at least) of arthritis. The weather stinks and the food stinks and he complains all the time.

He doesn't *know* he's dying, dig it, any more than he knows he's "old" — a notion both too abstract and concrete to be of any use to him. He does, however, seem all too aware that he's LOSING IT. A window sill only two feet off the floor is now a difficult jump for him. He hasn't got the spring he once did, and unless his timing is perfect he'll blow it. This *maddens* him— he eows loudly...howls!...flashes me his what-the-hell-is=going-on? look. I rap on the sill to encourage another try, but he rarely goes for it. Too proud to suffer assistance, he'll promptly jump down if I lift him up there. Never chases moths or flies anymore — can't keep up with 'em.

Lately he's cleaning himself less...could there be too little saliva to spare? When it gets really hot he does no grooming at all, and by the time he gets to it, with all the accumulated sweat, his coat is stiff and matted. He picks at it with his teeth and gets nowhere, mopes and moans and sits around looking, oh — what's that stupid, cutesy catword? — scruffy.

Has his weight gone down because his appetite is failing, or might Fancy Feast, which was shit to begin with, be getting worse? Every time I open a can, a given flavor, it looks different, smells different, from a few weeks before — am I imagining things? When he walks away from Savory Salmon Feast, a former favorite, I defer to *his* taste and open something else, but in what LANGUAGE can I deal with his blaring bewilderment, his sense of world-gone-fucking-wrong? It maddens *me* that I can't 'splain to him the snuffout of quality control (they get their salmon in the sewer, see), the unregulated exploitation of poor contingent beings (they don't care if you live or die).

The depth of my feelings for the little beast tears me apart. My sidekick, my pal, the first and only pet I've had with hair (if pet is really the word — I've always thought of him as heck, an equal), he's also the last. I won't be doing this number again. Why oh why, I ask, did I allow myself to get so viscerally involved with a warmblooded earthling who neither speaks nor understands a known human tongue, who can't be asked "Where does it hurt?" or even "How many fingers?," and certainly hasn't the means of volunteering such biz on his own? It tears my guts out that I can't tell him anything he'll understand 'bout how come he can't go outside no more.

The most colossal of his losses — by his reckoning, surely — and he didn't lose it, I took it. A tough guy, a fighter, he was getting in too many fights, which led to too many abscesses, which more than anything is what killed his kidneys. A bully when you get down to it, he could no longer take the measure of every new stray on the block, every dog smaller than a doberman, and once or twice he came home *mangled*. For more than a year now, he's been confined to quarters, where I've been not only his keeper, his jailer, but worse than that: his torturer.

So much for equality.

Once a day, to flush out his toxins, I give him a dose of greenish fluid from an IV bag, 150cc dripped or squeezed through the hole I poke with an inch-long needle in the loose skin of his back. Every time I poke him, he *yelps*...betrayal, anyone? Some claim that cats/dogs "know" when you're helping them...dunno. While the months go by and he's still living and — who can tell? — maybe in gen'ral hurting less, he's yet to stop yelping, and after I release him he lunges from my lap and scampers to the door, where he sniffs at the crack and cries.

OUT THERE: where all the goodtimes were. Wild youth, wild maturity. Anything — but — mellow middle age. The long hot run of a life/lived. Where he lived it all 'cept for inconsequentials like meals in cat-bowls and sleep. This geezer had his run.

Besides all the fights, and he really was pretty good vs. dogs (claws to the snout! — first strike preferred), he did his share of mouse catching, bird catching, tree and phone-pole climbing, blind leaps down open manholes, dashes up/down schoolyard fences in thunderstorms, and I saw him one time scale a 30-foot ladder, the kind with narrow rungs, to a roof where hot tar was being laid down, emerging (much later) and descending unscathed. Fond of vehicles, he enjoyed splitting up a single urination and directing its stream at the hubcaps of three separate cars, though hardly ever the first three — he was selective — and crawling in windows of tall trucks to smell the upholstery and piss on the steering wheel.

And, shoot, he must've gotten some kicks (or he wouldn't've done it) from his afternoons just hangin' out with me — interspecies "male bonding," alright? — the zillion times I brought a chair outside and sat with him as I doodled over the morning's writing. I'd sit and he'd sit, an hour, two hours, after which I'd follow him on his prowl, see him terrorize the neighborhood.

Now it's like he's in a nursing home.

Perched up there in his window seat, he gets very agitated when he spots a sparrow on a branch or a cat, 'specially one he used to beat on, roaming free. Whenever visitors come by, he follows the scent of street grit tracked in on their shoes, nuzzles mini-blades of grass fortuitously caught in a rut in the floor. On bright afternoons, he finds a suitable patch of light on the rug and settles there — as if he were outside. His fur is dark and the sun fries him like a biker in black leathers, dehydrating him worse than he already is, undercutting the day's forcefeed of liquids. I could close the blinds, natch, but what sort of asshole would take such a treat away from him? ('Twould be like taking an 80-year-old smoker's pack-o-cigs.) I won't fuck with his dignity, not anymore, but for a while, if he also happened to be napping, I would sometimes move an object — a box, a large pillow — between him and the sun. When he woke to see this, he got extremely vocal, yowling in sheer exasperation.

But those yowls wurn't nothin' compared to the ones he did — and does — when the sun is down. A creature more of Night than of Day — for 16 years, it was when he was most independent, autonomous, most unimpededly animal — he's likeliest then to get megacrazed about the fact of his imprisonment. Somewhere 'round midnight, the yowls become lonely wails — the volume goes up a notch, and the degree of urgency, until suddenly they're these ghastly, blood-curdling DISTRESS SIGNALS.

Which wake me, twitching, like no earthquake, no smoke alarm, no human caterwaul down the street, ever has, and I'm forced to wonder: Is he *dying*? Has a dire wolf broken in? Realizing that neither is the case, I figure maybe the s.o.b. has got his

appetite back, he needs a fresh can of slop, or I forgot to clean the litter box, but it never seems to be anything that mundane, or that specifiably doable, but something more on the level of *Wake up, dammit! and hang w/ me in another room!* Or, I dunno, *Be around for me— c'mon! — you're the only friend I've got.*

Whether I comply or not (and usually I do), there isn't a night I don't lose sleep...as if I ain't tired enough. Theoretically — if he can take naps, I can take naps — I could occasionally, prob'ly, make it up. More unsettling is his waking me out of dreams and I lose 'em. THE THIEF OF DREAMS! — add that to the list of things he'll never know about himself.

The little guy persists.

A fighter indeed, he's lasted six months longer than the vet's most optimistic forecast. He goes up and down, up and down, but he hasn't begun to give up the fight. One moment he's lying there grim and wasted, and I see the labored crawl of all living things to the Abyss. I leave the room, return, and he's walking on the keyboard of my computer — having hopped on a pile of books, from the books to a chair, then a table, and finally my desk — writing:

- rdertffffff[]'
- Erddddd96+88oppppppp pppppppppjwawsa/8***** ***,mk'/Ohyguj]['=e\ erd--=dxi89uuuu9Ooooooo oolokkkkl;po;0000;'p89dfv -O-----gf7yht6\\\\tygr yuhdfvdrctrfrftddddd dddploo

I hope, when I'm his age, I write as well.

Devo Plays Mensa

Some people I know, more well-intentioned than not, keep offering to help set up a website for show-&-telling shards of my writing to a "wider audience," instantly rendering me "less invisible" (as if somehow I've been hiding), but I always decline. The prospect totally, utterly revolts me, but who knows? — maybe my arm will be twisted (peer pressure is like that), and sooner or later I'll relent.

If so coerced, and someday, sure enough, I find myself stuck with a frigging home page, the message right up front, way at the top, will be: *I've already lived life for real. How's about if I live it for fake?*

As imitations-of-life go, have any, writ large, been shabbier than the Internet? Shabby but clean, like all these dot-com nerds, the yuppie cocksuckers who caretake the action, pay far more heed to cleanliness than content; as shabby as

death and not even real death, just death by default, by virtue of not-being life... a room of dead mannequins... or daytime TV.

At its utter bottom-line "best" — most arch — at sites overseen by some o' your more acid-headed yuppie idiots — it has the look and feel of Devo at a Mensa convention...how groovy. At its worst — or in general — the trickle-down "populist" version — it's the acrylic sock section at Kmart.

What a giggle pit!... what a seedy "public world" to have served on a plate.

Listen, folks...I have online access 'cause as a writer it's now *mandatory*. Editors want instant delivery of the fruits of your labor. I never graze the Internet for anything like fun & frolic. But so you don't think I'm totally out of it, The Man From Yesterday, no fun nohow, there's a cyberpit I do drop in on from time to time: the English language site of the Nihon Sumo Kyokai, the governing body of sumo — the only sport I follow anymore.

[Http://www.sumo.or.jp/index_e.html](http://www.sumo.or.jp/index_e.html)...check it out...six tournaments a year (the odd-numbered months)...y'might find it a hoot.

Nothing

There is nothing that concerns me less than the decor of my own home.

D.C.

Diminished capacity. Does 7 plus 4 equal 11, or does it equal 3?

Impaired mental acuity and memory miseries (short term and long) and all that crap.

Who was the "New Journalist" who wrote the *Esquire* article on Joe DiMaggio... not Gore Vidal...not Vidal Sassoon...what the hell was his name? Christ, it was *famous*...got reprinted...fuggit.

And who's that German vibes player, uhh, played some very out shit, had an album on ESP, lived in Woodstock awhile? One syllable last name...or is it two? Definitely not Borah Bergman.

Or like I'll somehow remember the *complete* details of a story I heard the other day — or earlier the same day — but have trouble 'membering WHO told it t' me...can't put a face (or voice!) on it.

When I saw Matt Dillon in *Drugstore Cowboy* whine about how hopeless it can get sometimes just having to tie your shoes, I thought: whudda stretch! 'Taint under *any* circumstances that difficult. Well...hoo!...as somethin' to even just *keep track of*, 'tis! I can go a quarter-mile without NOTICING mine're untied.

I'll be *doggone* if the GEEZER EPISODES hain't been piling up. I'll go for a pizza and totally forget where I parked the car...no idea. Circle the block, all four streets, both sides, nope, so I walk the next block, and the next: where izzzzit?! Then a few days later the goddam battery dies 'cause I turned the headlights on, not off— in mid-afternoon. It'd been dark and rainy, see, but that was the previous aft. Hey— I knew I was s'posed to do *something* onoff- wise (I jus'got it wrong).

Then there's this nail that I missed, I was clipping 'em. Fourth finger, right hand, is that the ring finger? You go nail by nail by nail, left to right, how do you MISS ONE? I don't believe I ever missed one before...but whuddo I know?

It drives me infuckingsane.

And I can't balance my checkbook anymore to save my life, even with a calculator. Used to be a snap. And I can't pay bills on time, can't keep on top of the chore of paying them. I put 'em in a stack and the stack keeps stacking. Gets so daunting it's scary. How long before they shut off my power — or my sorry ass gets evicted?

Some holistic guy I ran into in a bar thought there might be a left brain/right brain aspect to it, y'know writing and then writing *checks*, going from the "creative" to the "practical," and he recommended I try the Hawaiian Haaaaaaa Breath. Breathe in through your nose, deep, exhale through your mouth...*haaaaaaaaaa*...then in through your nose again: do the whole thing five times. Or was it ten? Well I've done it five, I've done it ten...ha ha haaaa.(Could it be he was putting me on?)

On somebody else's suggestion, I've started taking ginkgo, which I find makes me about five percent more alert, more able to cop to operational details — hey, I'll take it. ('S better than three percent.) She also mentioned bee pollen, but I can't recall if that had to do with alertness or the immune system. I shoulda wrote it down.

What I've gotta really do now is write EVERYTHING down, and leave all kindsa notes to myself ("gas for car"... "rent due Monday") where I'll be certain to see 'em, like on a chair I'm gonna use or the counter next to the fridge or on the bathroom floor...write 'em as soon as I *think* to write 'em — no waiting a sec! — or it'll be "Duh...whut wuz it I was *about* to write down???"

And as far as the alleged creative rubbish goes, I'm not so adept now'— days at navigating even one side of my brain. G-g-gone is my ability to write on lotsa subjects simultaneous, bing bang bing — and it once was one of my stronger credentials. Working whole-hog at only TWO PIECES, two separate assignments, at the same time: no can do! Shifting gears from one to the other, I lose the thread of both, shoot my wad just finding my way back to either one of 'em, and after five paragraphs I feel like scrawling "To be continued." And continuing. later.

I call on more subsets of myself to write than in days of old 'cuz I NEED to mobilize more parts of myself. If the mind can't do it alone, the heart hasta pull some nasty weight. We'll find out soon what capacity my heart has for write-muscle shitwork. Gonad writing? Well, there's that too, eh? (Whatever it takes.)

Jeez — it's gotten to where I can barely hack *worrying* about more than a couple things at once. A return-o-call I do not wanna make to an ex-girlfriend who wants a bigggg, agonizing favor of me; date with the dentist after not having gone for seven years: to add a third vexation and a FOURTH would produce neuro-overload. My system short-circuits, there's a maximum stress point.

And actual crises... whew! If I lost my keys and my glasses, that'd be one godawful bummer. If on top of that I lost my wallet— or my left shoe — or my fucksucking computer broke — it would effectively DEMOLISH ME. There's no way I could live another 15 minutes.

Savage Meat, Pungent Meat (Undiminished Lust)

- you
- want
- show &
- tell, well:
- the smell of a woman (any woman) merely SUG
- GESTED BY
- the smell (stink?) of me is often sufficient to make me abandon EVERYTHING

Cooties

Ageism? *Heck* yeah, it exists. Is real. Rampant, even. In the town where I live, *overt* racism, sexism and even classism, homophobia, anti-other-people's-cultural- et-cetera are fairly rare, which is to say that while many may harbor topical prejudices, many most have at least become hep to the protocols of concealing and

containing their public *expression*...but this does NOT seem so cozily the case with anti-geezer predilection. Lotsa folks, i.e., nongeezer folks, have developed no habits for biting their tongues in real-time verbal dealings with geezers, or even pre-geezer. When it comes to expressing, oh, certain particular point-blank things, geezers are still fair prey...they're open-season slow-moving targets.

As a pre-geezer, or a late pre-geezer, or an early geezer — whatever I am — I've been getting a taste of what's in store: a round of previews.

This guitarist I run into who always shamelessly sucks up to me, hoping maybe I'll write about him, egged me recently into telling a bunch of dumb stories 'bout my encounters with bands from before he was born, bands that later — through recordings — he got to appreciate (and steal licks from). I was feeling generous, and he kept begging for more! more! more!, when suddenly he lost interest and snapped at me, all but kicking me in the nuts: "Enough of the old WAR STORIES already" — say what?...like I was some grimsweaty Jack Lemmon or Jimmy Stewart getting weepy-eyed about D-Day. Then, to hype me on a new band he was getting together, he sez to me, with no irony whatsoever: "In your time, you'd have really liked us" — in my time?! Which you think is now all up? Well fuck YOU, shithead! (You also owe me 4 bucks.)

When I was 53, a 21-year-old stripper I'd been bouncing around with, and by bounce I'm talkin' mainly bar-hopping — I'd buy the beers, and sometimes she'd buy 'em — she told me at some point it wasn't "such a good idea" to chum around with somebody twice her age. "Shit," I said, cutting to the chase, "why don't you do the long division? I'm two and a half times your age — old enough, prob'ly, to be your grandpa." "Well, right...that's what I was saying." And therefore what — you don't cotton to the prospect of me DYING on you? Rather not be SEEN with a soonto-be prune face? Y'think I'm a fucking VAMPIRE sucking yer youth? (Well, honey, I'm not that nuts about yer youth.)

Hey! — whoa! — I could understand if I were some kind of boring old nuisance or something, a fool spouting antique vernac like "balderdash" or "jimony christmas," but these jerks wanted a whiff of my seasoned p.o.v., fallout from my vast (um) experience, and they got off galore on my knowing more- than-them — more than I got off on any of their finer qualities — & then in the end it's like I was just a prop, a curiosity, an "other" in their midst...they would rather be with their OWN KIND. Well, fine.

'S not like I take such treatment personally — I'd rather not consort with geezers either — but I do still have a degree of vitality left, I've got fun fun FUN up the old wazoo, so it doesn't really make too much sense to me. By no means am I covered

with even a thin layer of dust yet, and to cut to the only chase that matters: so the hell WHAT if I were (and what happens when finally I am?)?

Really, boys and girls, I *don't* wanna be in a room full of geezers, but to no greater extent than I'd avoid one containing a gang of lawyers, or PGA golfers, or high school gym teachers, or evangelical missionaries, or Hollywood coke addicts, or commodities brokers, or cops. Truly, I do not wanna be stuffed in dense with old coots and old farts — but I could certainly take 'em one or two at a time.

And like what's the score, anyway (irrational? rational?), on geezer anathema? How'd they get to be shunned like LEPERS, like homeless wretches outside yuppie espresso joints? What is it that compassionless cretins half their age (you know who you are!) have against them, f'r crying out loud?

Granted, in their endgame they don't move so fast, and to scuzzy judgmental types they might not look so fab, and they're fuck-hard at times to understand, and what about those eeky aftershaves they use?...but that don't begin to explain it.

Geezers are needy? Helpless, even? Well, much of humankind is helpless and needy...you ever see the band Cat Power, Chan Marshall? They're sour, caustic, and bitter? You shoulda met the late-great M.T. Kinney at 25.

Is it simply, or chiefly, the STAMP OF ENDGAME emblazoned on the surface of their being? Itchytwitchy evidence to young louts of their own mortality, of the literal way of all flesh and all flash? A case of shoot-the-messenger? Or would that be a mite too metaphoric — and teleological — and mightn't there be a little too much denial on young'uns' parts for such a leap-o-logic?

Or, after all is said and done, might it boil down to no more, no less, than the creeping ineffable: COOTIES?

Geezer cooties! (The way of all all.)

My Own Skin

Though it appears feasible, seldom have I been able to write my way out of it. Oh! would it suit me to scam the "me" scene! More than likely, you need to be dead to pull it off.

ON-OFF

We would all, of course, be better off dead. Is that a truism or what?

No more pain, no more disappointment or responsibility, no more shit to fear, nothin'. The ultimate in relief and deliverance, the ultimate in slack-off.

No more tumbling to the age-old con of "striving," no more lockstep or gimp-step to the fetish of "playing out your string." Could death take your breath away with greater viciousness or greater efficiency than life itself already does? If there's a problem anywhere, obviously it's not in the being dead — that part's e-z — but in the dying: the torment of having your action stamped CANCELED!... the cheap, vile drama of a useless bod tossing in the SPONGE...the perpetual fret over WHEN?, over HOW?...the whiteknuckle wait 'til whate'erthe- bleak-fuck rounds the bend belching STEAM as it choo-choos straight at YOU to bulldoze you screaming in ag' every INCH of your last sleazy mile.

No: death ain't no-way the "great mystery" that dying is, and with suicide as an option, a tool — the anodyne in your pocket! — y'even get to specify the when and the how.

Don't know 'bout you, but I've thought of killing myself a good quarter to a third of the mornings of my life, faced with yet another day of IT, and my fair share of noons and nights as well, in direct response to unbearable obstacles (to sundry whatev) falling, lurching, wobbling in the way, for instance DEMONS. There's no living through them (it's inconceivable!), so why not blow everything that's blowable away? If you can't put out the fire, eliminate the matter. (They dynamite oil wells, don't they?)

Methods I've considered: bullet to the head, right side (I'm a righty); bullet through the eye (no preference left or right); jump from a tall building (the kind Superman used to leap in a single bound); normal hanging w/ rope; hanging w/ barbed wire 'round my neck. I've never entertained thoughts of *cutting* my throat — it has a nice ring to it, though — nor of slicing my guts. These would require some finesse, and if you muff it, where are you?

Poison, f 'rinstance cyanide? That can't be too pleasant. But pills, y'know, like valium or seconal — yeah, why not?

I've also fantasized a good shortlist of undoable scenarios — things you couldn't verywell do yourself — like an arrow in the face from 50 paces. (Wouldn't it be great to be *both* archer and target?) A railroad spike through the heart'd probably take more than one whack — plus you wouldn't exactly have the right angle — but that's definitely one I could feature. And it sure would be neat to throw your own severed head under the wheels of an oncoming truck...alone, you'd have to make it an unsevered one.

HERE'S a nifty, baroque end-dream: to be poked through the heart by a spear weighted down by a TWO-STORY HOUSE. The inhabitants wouldn't have to leave. With so much weight, it would slide through you like a tusk through butter.

All that said, I must confess I meditate on suicide less than I used to — way less. Could it be that the concept has less verbiage, less bombast, when you're actually near (or nearer) the end? You'd be surprised, but when it comes to putting the big gilt-edged *frame* around all this shit, life is quite a bit like wrestling — bombast plays a huge fucking part. Bombast and Romance.

Y'know, I'm as romantic as the next a-hole, but capital-R Romance as a NOTION, as an all-accommodating vehemence, has its time and its place, its stage and wardrobe, its dance and its tune — and the substructure of this Romantic number is the proper toss-off of, oh— you guessed it — Callow Youth.

Unless there's an immediate something to urgently deal with — an inoperable nose tumor, let's say— suicide, like Trix, is indeed for kids. As a fast-food solution, an objective to aspire to, it's for people still in chapter 1 or 2 (no later than 3): grandiloquents young and vain enough to imagine they've got SO! MUCH! MORE! to erase. (Been there, ahem, so I know.)

In the later chapters, life on its own does a bloody fine job erasing every massive slab of the dang shebang that genuinely counts. All that's left to efface is the declarative sentence "I am living."

Don't Remem

Can anybody out there *please* help me?

Who (or what) is (or ever was) DOGGY JULIAN— or possibly Doggie Julian?

Early to late 1960s.

(Possibly in a dream.)

Half Remem

"I am a soldier, big and strong. To some good boy I'll soon be-long."

Or it might've been "sailor."

The earliest clump of text I even half remember... jeezus.

No, it's not some army/navy pedophile thing — or is it? — but a line from a Christmas play in the first or second grade. I was playing a toy, see. That would be 1951 or '52. The Korean War was on.

Wait, let me...uh...first grade.

Did I wear a soldier or a sailor suit?

Uhhhhhhhh.

Could it have been white? Blue? Khaki doesn't ring a bell.

Geezerology

So where were we? Ah, yes.

When we suspended our seminar on "geezer clothes," we were pondering the issue of solutions — stopgap or otherwise — sensible paths for pre-geezers imminently faced with the Wearing Of The Ug. In a nutshell, what it oozes down to is not one but TWO hot categories of direct action: P.G.D. and P.G.R.

But before we get there, some general comments:

First and foremost, and once and for all, let's quash the rumor that the more clothes you have, the longer you live. That's the bunk!

INCENTIVES to live long??? There are many. But what higher inducement than to outlive one's ugs? Outlive your ugs or your ugs will outlive you! In short: dress ugly now or dress it later — the choice is YOURS — but here's the kicker:

While an increased wearing of unfavored items will extend the life of the favored — and you surely have your work cut out for you — it would be a grave mistake to lose sight of the, uh, precariousness of your P-G predicament. Increased frequency ups other probabilities as well, including the prob of croaking while ug-attired. You may only be at the first fork in the geezer road, no farther, and still it could hap any minute: you could die like a DAWG in that Disney World sweatshirt in what is it, ochre? mauve?, and be terminally known as one who dressed repulsive. It'll forever be your lot, your reputation, the final embarrassing entry in your GOOFUS FILE.

No, you'd be better served keeping it part-time. Designate a Pre-Geezer Day once, twice, three times a month. It would be helpful, natch, if Congress established it by

statute— a public Pre-Geezer Day — but they haven't even legalized fucking yet...you can't depend on those stiffies. "Self help" (in the v. best sense) is what this is about: a P.G.D. of your very own— as personal as your P.I.N. Mark it on the calendar (don't forget!).

Every night, meanwhile, can be Pre-Geezer Night. Unless you've got a special date, wear your worst as pajamas or underjamas.

But even FOUR days a month might not shake a dent in your stash. You can't just toss unwanted wear'ems (didn't your mother tell you?)— you'll need a workable policy of P.G.R.: pregeezer recycle.

And by recyc I don't mean pass 'em on. Don't think for a sec about inflicting your unwanted on the clothesless! Would you give *tainted food* to the malnourished and starving? Would you have the homeless live in Port-A-Potties?

Your unsightly outfits are part of *your* karma; to pass them on is to bypass the hallowed ORDER OF THINGS. It is garbatorially *invalid*, not to mention flatout *rude*.

No — we're talking legitimate ALTERNATIVE USES here, not pass-alongs.

A starting roster of justifiable recycs would include:

— Medical emergencies. Wrap a burn, bandage a bug bite, apply pressure where the roof of your mouth was gashed by broken glass in a tuna sandwich.

— Towels. With global warming, you may need sweat towels more than you currently 'spect. Be my guest: wipe your brow with the ugliest sock in the house.

— Curtains. For those sew inclined, a needle & thread will join up sundry g.g.'s (garish garments) real good. Too garish to wear on the street — but *dandy* cov'ring a window. When the sun comes shining thru, it's just like stained glass!

— Pillows. Geezers need naps. Fill one oversized shirt or t-shirt w/ seven others. How comfy!

— Speaking of naps: nappies. Washable, reusable monthly absorbers for those still menstruating, or f 'r menstruating someones— U-know. Rig cut-to-fit apparel strips with tape or safety pins, or just stuff a handful in your undies. Never spend a DIME on napkins again!

— Hankies. Is there any real diff between noseblow on a pants leg and noseblow on an “official” handkerchief?

— Beverage enhancers. Shred 100% cotton-wear, plop in a blender w/ fruit juice or soy milk for a deelishus high-fiber drink. Chill in the icebox for healthful, flavorful popsicles...mmmm yum! First check labels to insure there is no polyester, nylon, rubber or fiberfill. (A fine use for rayon as well.)

— Shoes: bang nails with ‘em. At least knock tacks in cork and particle board.

— Ties. Ties?? What’re you, some kind of fop? Ties you can just throw out.

A note on RAG CONVERSION. To gratuitously turn garments into rags before they are rags is for spudheads. If once in a longwhile you need a rag, that’s one thing, but don’t overdo it!

The byword in any act of recycle: to thine own geezer self be true. Be aboveboard in your search for alternatives — no arts & crafts for its own sake. That’s for hobbyists, and dressing is hardly a hobby! An alt use should be as essential as an original one, i.e., the covering or adorning of human flesh in accordance with legal, practical, and esthetic conventions and pretensions.

Even if others don’t know you’ve exceeded your sanction, you would know: you’d know you are a GEEZER AND A PHONY, and, well, they don’t give out medals for THAT.

Epistemology

In days of yore, I was quasifamed as a bloke fond of burning britches — pardon — bridges: torching them with extreme malice on the flimsiest of provocations.

If my age-peer crowd was once very hip to the activity, I was hipper. I gloried in it.

So how is it I’m not burning them TODAY?

Well, it isn’t ‘cause the onrush of years is starting to scare me; there are times lately where I’m scared shitless, but I can’t say they’ve made me an advocate of bridge safety.

Nor am I refraining because I’m less of a firebug, or even ‘cause there probably ain’t too many *personal* bridges left to burn.

I simply can no longer TELL a bridge from the water — can't distinguish one from the other!— or dry fucking land. Or which end is "my"end. I wouldn't know how to target a bridge if you put a gun to my head.

Be that as it may, it's entirely possible I am in fact still burning th'm — burn ing 'em royally! — only I couldn't tell you with any certainty. Couldn't begin to guess the where and when.

The Copenhagen Story

I've never smoked cigarettes. There's supposedly some Russian doctor who says that if you're over 50 and have never smoked, go ahead— it's good for you. The nicotine will rejuvenate a whole host of mental processes, it'll make you perky, on the ball, et cet., and since you're on in years, you most likely won't LIVE LONG ENOUGH to develop lung cancer. Sounds good — I love nicotine — but he's talking cigs, and I've never been able to get past the taste of the burning paper.

It's too bad I've instead used up (already!) my life quota of the form of tobacco I've gotten far & away the most mileage from: chew a/k/a chaw— my most odious intake at a time, like 20- 25 years ago, when I really was something of a selfdestructo.

And to boldly claim I ain't one still,well,that might ordinarily be the plan, but no sooner am I caught up in a writing project than old habits and old intakes walk right back and make their presence felt: cigars, rotten food, enough caffeine to stun a wildebeest. Beers? Not too many while writing, just as a "reward" for getting somewhere pagewise, and as the age count goes up, the page count goes down down down. Even short to medium things take long these days, leading to sieges like this one (six months! no end in sight!): a protracted rampage of screw-my-health, whatever it takes to crawl to the end.

Writing full tilt like I am,I can't bother with cooking — ya kidding? — so what I'm eating right now, my dinner!, is a jumbo bag of bar-b-q chips containing (let's see): sodium caseinate, sodium diacetate, disodium inosinate, disodium guanylate— a li'l bit o' sodium, huh? — in addition to salt and MSG. And food dyes, well, there are three yellows, a red,and two blues— BLUE?— if this was paint, you could do a fucking seascape. Which, take my word for it, I would not be eating if I weren't writing,and I wonder, d'you think (do ya do ya?) any of these ingredients could give you "C"?

'Cuz I do fear "C,"okay?, and not simply on account of the little practice brush I've had with it (pinheadsize basal cell on my neck nine years ago).Every time I puff on a little-c cigar and my heart races like Secretariat (so I know, inhale or no, it's

damnwell there in my SOMA), I'm all too conscious of the "risk," and I thank my lucky STARS that a timely bum experience ended my dance with the biggest and nastiest of tobacco C's: Copenhagen. I gag just thinking about it...

Somewhere in the late '70s, when I was flirting with some really yugsick chewbacs like Red Man and Days Work, I saw an ad in the back of *Sports Illustrated* — fill out this form and Copenhagen ("the smokeless tobacco") will send you FOUR free tins: what a deal. They weren't all Copenhagen *per se* — there was also Skoal, and I vaguely remember a raspberry version of the same brown ammoniated stuff— but a tin wasn't cheap, and their giving away so many should've made a ding-dong firebell go off.

As it turned out, four was exactly enough to get me hooked, ooh boy, and I mean DEPENDENT. Well, maybe not textbook dependent— it wasn't like I needed it to get through the hours, the day, or feel actual physical withdrawal pangs, but I needed it for fucksure to write. It was very speedy, and right away. I could almost wake up on Copenhagen alone and be writing, full throttle, immediately. My mind felt incredibly mobile, darting back and forth, up and down, like a goddam Pac-Man thingie...how remarkable. Once I realized its effectiveness, how could I (why should I) stop?

For five years I used it every day, a "pinch between lip and gum," refreshed and supplemented by mammoth fingerfuls as required. Ammoniated? Dunno. But *something* caustic and corrosive was part of the mix, 'cause in no time flat my inside lip was being corroded. Eaten away. I'd go a week, two weeks, corroding the right side, then switch to the left, and on and on back again, back again. Craters formed and healed, only to be dug anew. When I spit there would often be blood. Which told me pretty early on this was BAD JUJU — if it wasn't how you got cancer, there was no such animal. (This was before they painted chips blue.) Periodically, I would resolve to kick, I'd throw out my last tin, then as soon as I had to get a paragraph done right! now! I would run out and rummage through the dumpster...yowee.

What finally did it for me was one night I was at the typewriter, two teacups on my desk. One held cold tea, no milk, the other served as my spittoon. Two cups of dark brown liquid, and at some wee hour, bleary-eyed, I gulped down the cup of TOBACCO SPIT. I have not taken a pinch of C since.

Rites

When I was in high school, I didn't know anyone in a band. It was rumored that an original member of Jay & the Americans, someone not on any of their records, had

once gone to our school — some blond guy a couple of classes ahead— but seeing his pic in a yearbook, I didn't recognize him.

The summer I was 20, a group of my friends formed a band, an imitation Rolling Stones, that played one chaotic bar date.

In '67, when I was 22, the "scene" mushroomed exponentially, and through my 20s I stood face to face with *hundreds* of people in bands, and was actual friends with several— I'd hate to call them celebs— known quantities of rock rock rock and roll.

By the time I was 32, I'd already been in two bands myself...big deal.

Today, membership in *at least one band*, however briefly, seems a rite of passage for practically everyone. How many people do you know, menwomen 30 and up, who've never been in a band, or tried to be in a band, or thought of learning bass because of an opening in some band that didn't care if their bassplayer could even *play* — they just needed somebody by Friday?

A rite, yes, and one that becomes more benign all the time — no longer on a par, as it once was, with selling dope or part-time whoring or joining the Marines. Ironically or not (now that rock qua rock has ceased to be a bona fide universal solvent), in your average case it's more like a calisthenic, a strut...nothing wrong with that. The problem comes in when the calisthenic gets out of hand, starts calling for more and more reps, and lofty forethought or no, suddenly finds itself a MISSION.

Folly

I should talk about missions!

Fortunately or unfortunately, writing was not a rite of spring for me. It wasn't remotely anything I thought about as a kid, or an adolescent, or a postadolescent — it was one of the last things I'd ever 've wanted to grow up and do. I had no writing "heroes" whatsoever. I didn't like reading.

Yet at some point: BINGO. I was hooked.

Except for the ones I take in my mind, I haven't had a vacation in possibly 20 years, and I haven't taken too many weekends off in the last 30. If it's a day of the week, my nose is to the grindstone.

"Every day is Saturday," said Jack Kerouac and Handsome Dick Manitoba. For me, every day is more like Tuesday.

Which may be funny in a way, but I honestly don't always know what day it is in the "world out there." To occasionally be off by one day is understandable, but lately, with alarming regularity, I'm getting to be off by two or three.

There are times when I wish that a week as practiced by everyone else had only six days, or five...seven is just too many to keep track of.

The Great Jazz Book That Only I Could Write

I'm not gonna write it.

Use

Biospherically speaking, as complexes of protoplasm, as machines operating at their uttermost efficiency, we humans have such pitifully limited use, and when our workings go a-clunker...phew!

When all we are is a pathetic waste of cells, how can you blame the directors of the factory for taking us out back and STEPPING ON US?

Models (2)

Harry Rademacher is the only guy I know with an eye patch. For a long while he didn't wear one. Though his left eye never looked where the right was looking, he never mentioned it — so you didn't either. Then one day, *voilà!* "How do you like it?" he asked. "A present from Edna" — his 46-year-old sweetie. "She thought it would make me look distinguished." Indeed: a distinguished, pony-tailed Captain Hook.

Harry is 63. A year ago, he quit his job as a dishwasher to work full-time on a book he'd been painstakingly researching, and slowly but surely pecking out, over nights and weekends of the previous 16 years. Before the dish gig, he worked as a Spanish professor, a library supervisor, assistant to a minor league hockey exec, until a windchange convinced him *Enougha this white-collar b.s.! — better to bus tables.*

The first friend-o-mine living on Social Security, he opted to start collecting at 62, not 65, when he learned he'd have to live to 77 to come out ahead by waiting. "I'm crazy for longshots, but that feels a smidge beyond my reach." Maybe, maybe not, but he does — *fuck yes* — expect to survive long enough to complete the book, and he's only on the first draft. The most singularly motivated buzzard I know, he'll let nothing stand in his way, including auto insurance. He's been driving uninsured for

six months now, and is about to let the bank repossess his Nissan." Sure I love driving places" — the track, for inst — "but there's NO TIME for it. All there's time for is the tome."

In addition to the staples of his diet, home-made goulash and saltines, he limits disbursement of his S.S. pittance to rent, laundry, gasoline (but not for long), cheap cigarettes, and bargain-basement beer, well, sometimes he'll splurge on Lucky Lager.

Every few weeks, we get together at his pad and talk it up. He shows me some pages and I give him feedback and help copyedit. I tell him what reads clunky or unclear, and I challenge and encourage him to *keep at it*. Since generally speaking I wouldn't advise my worst enemy to write, in current parlance I am his "enabler." All of which may seem even more unlikely when I tell you that the volume in progress is a work of ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP.

Y'might by now have a rough idea how I feel about academia — and academic writers — but Harry, though one serious prick, ain't one o' *them* in the slightest. Declaring himself an "academy of one" — a "*nonspectator* scholar" — he's taken on the task of composing a "secret intellectual history," one that crosses the bounds between shitloads of academic genres and sub-genres, and a sprinkling of non-ac's as well. Even that may sound like standard fare — what the hey — but I've read most of the damn thing, and it's often *terrific*.

And how is it terrific? Well, for one thing, it is really *all over the place*. I've seen 300 pages, sardinepacked with references to hotshots from Herodotus to Sappho to Boethius to Bernard of Clairvaux to Cervantes to Voltaire to Ludwig Feuerbach to Sacher-Masoch to William James to Giuseppe Verdi to Alfred Jarry to Babe Ruth to Joseph Campbell to Robert Mapplethorpe to Rasputin to Max Weber to Lash La Rue (I kid you not) to Edna St. Vincent Millay to Edna Vitaliano, Harry's womanfriend — a former underwear model. "I'd like to also have her on the cover" — he winks, showing me the pic he has in mind...ah *ha*.

All over, that's one, and for another — hey — it's a big, sprawling, jolly mess of SMUT.

The Chi-Psi-Omega Hypothesis: The Search for a Collective Pornography — that's the working title. Harry cautions me, however, about labeling it smut. "Don't get carried away. 'Pornography' is just a buzz-word to pique the reader's interest. Yes, by all means, I'm concerned with the evolution of sexual thinking, that is, *human* sexual thinking, and from what you've read so far, you know that on an anthropological — scratch that — on a *zoological* level, we as a species have a neocortex — do we ever!

— but do the dendrites in our genitalia perform a less libidinal function than those in the genitalia of goats?

“And therefore?? Well, I could just as easily have subtitled it *The Continental Divide Between Inorganic and Organic Thinking*...an allusion to a prevalent dogma among professional academy thinkers. All I’m trying in my humble way to do is undivide things a little.” He shoots me a stern look, then winks. “Smut! You’re absolutely right! I like it!”

There are times when I worry about my friend’s health. Though he hasn’t seen a doctor in years, he swears his heart, liver and lungs are “not half bad, well, not three-quarters.” A few months ago, when a strange tingling sensation visited both forearms up to the elbow, he refused medical attention. “It isn’t really that unpleasant,” he insisted. Although not knowing what was going on was unnerving, the worst part, before it subsided, was losing a week’s work. “Time ain’t on my side, Jack! I need every last nanosecond.”

Pop another Lucky!

Irrelevant

A simultaneous mass exit, like the whole world going down in one fell swoop— “armageddon,” “holocaust,” “nuke time U.S.A.,” whatever you wanna call it — is terrifying in no small part because it would make all of our individual deaths irrelevant, rob them of their uniqueness — a bogus uniqueness, to be sure, but one forever seen as crucial to the projected end gestalt. (You’re born alone, you die alone — *that* old chestnut.)

“See here how everything lead up to this day,” sang the Grateful Dead in 1970, speaking of an old man’s day of dying, his lying in pain (for passersby’s amusement) as his sole final anything. With world snuffout, personal agony has no moment, and nobody lies dying, everybody just DIES...ceases to be...is and then summarily ISN’T...and nothing else is, or was, ever again, ever...even words aren’t, and weren’t.

The thought of dying young — “before your time” — in such a universal termination is one grimly unacceptable excruciation. To be over 45, let’s say, or 50 — to already be in the “death zone”— and be faced with imagining that same annihilation is quite another. To have toiled and moiled through a lifeworth of delusions, for an approximate minimum full-life’s duration, and have it add in a flash to undifferentiated molecules on the slag heap of undifferentiated nothing— now THAT is a frightening outcome to grapple with.

If for no other reason than to serve as an exemplar, let me get fatuously personal: to be forced to surrender the concept of FUTURE, and of strangers not yet born, their *grandparents* not yet born, finding delight (or finding anything) in my silly writings; to in the same breath abandon, after so long and foolishly embracing, something as absurd as the notion of works (and words!) that OUTLIVE MEN...well...fuck shit piss godfuckingdammit...*tell me about it*, okay?

Unfinished Business

I should *probably* take acid at least one more time.

Nostalgia

In Guided by Voices' "Have It Again," Robert Pollard poses the musical question "What would you give to be 9 or 10 again?," then the same Q re "19 or 20," and finally "49 or 50" ...oh, priceless yrs! oh, precious past!

Yeah, yeah...*right*.

Y'gotta believe me when I tell you I wouldn't wanna have it, and would hate to have to have it — to be any of those ages! — again. They all have their work and their woe, and the work and the woe outweigh the jollity and the joy.

Sheezus — I pity the poor 19-yr-old stuck living NOW— on this planet— why the hell would I wanna be one? Nor would I 'zactly wanna revisit being one THEN. To get there from *here* would mean toting a 12- pack (min.) of, oh, call it insight— you can't not bring it. Perspicacity? Or worse: a small working replica of my current late-model shit detector — a laptop s.d., if you will. You would only hafta crank it halfway for it to do its dirtywork. Which on time-trip turf would bring out some of my more GEEZERESQUE TRAITS, like my stick-in-the-mud tenacity at "seeing through shucks" (oh yawn). The balmy things we oldtimers take pride in!

Now of course I wouldn't mind being younger in body, you betcha — but a younger, less up-to-speed *psyche*? No thank you! Innocence, relative or otherwise, is really not something I would care to recapture. As it is, I'm still a fairly innocent schmuck, and it wouldn't appeal to me t' be MORE SO — certainly not at the expense of all the oceans of sweat I've bled getting to "know better," becoming even marginally less of a dumb-ass fuck.

If innocence, or nondisbelief, emotional benightedness, whatever, be the key ingredient in getting off on a full range of hands-as-dealt, well, that's completely, totally objectionable. There might well be more pleasure, and hotter and cooler kicks,

to be had being more dumb as opposed to less dumb, but at this advanced date, something in the emotional ecology of the situation disposes me towards the latter...and if that makes me an old fussbudget, hey, so be it.

It takes all (as they say) kinds.

John Cassavetes once said: "There are no great films...only great scenes." Well, I'm not sure I even do miss all that much about any o' these old temporal turfs, epochs of ancient self, even from AFAR, but yes (ah me): there were certainly moments!

Haiku #3

- does my dick have scales?
- (many miles since last
- checkup)
- rust or barnacles?

Ago

With the triumph of the CD now complete, none of this has any currency anymore, but it once was a semibig deal to reach a recordspeed milestone in one's own life — to turn 33 1/3, for example. Though it hardly meant as much as turning 30, 40, or 20, it was something you were sure to be aware of; it was good for a giggle.

By the time I turned 45 it no longer meant zip in the contempo promenade; and if I make it to 78, whether or not I still have my wits about me, I don't anticipate even thinking about it.

Hey — I'm already at an age where I can look back on major occurrences of my life, of my *adult* life, that happened 33 1/3 years AGO.

Before my next birthday, in fact, it will be 33 1/3 since the release of my alltime favorite 33 1/3'er, *The Beatles* (a/k/a "The White Album") and one of the most happily recalled nights of my life.

One Friday afternoon, November '68, the FM affiliate of WABC, New York, announced that "the new Beatle album" would be played in its entirety that evening. This was at a time when it wasn't even for sure there would be another Beatle album. (Their previous LP, *Magical Mystery Tour*, hadn't really been an album at all. True, it contained the A and B sides of some great singles, but the new stuff, what little there was of it, included arguably their worst cut ever, "Your Mother Should Know.")

An actual new album, and a *double* album yet: yay! At the Long Island home of a band called the Soft White Underbelly, with whom I was living off and on, aiding and abetting and writing lyrics, everybody was STOKED.

As zero hour approached, we smoked some very potent hash and ordered a pizza. We: the band, my girlfriend Roni and I, the drummer's girlfriend Helen. I don't remember Eric ("Manny"), the soon-to-be singer, being there. Les, the vocalist of record (who still lived in the house and was all but ignored), definitely wasn't, but all the others were: Albert, Allen, Andy, Don. That night, we would be something very much like "family," or "tribe" — oh, even "household" would do — in that Late Sixties maxi-kinship sense — though no such unanimity of connection would ever come close to rearing its head again.

Bob Lewis, one of the more bearable, and less hyper-obnoxious, deejays in New York, began by announcing: "First I'm gonna skip around and play things in a sequence that means something to *me*. Then I'll play the whole album in the right order." Twice!!

Beginning with "Bungalow Bill," we heard cut after cut of what the Beatles at their best always did best — an ur-rendition of Hybrid Music in extremis: "Back in the U.S.S.R." (the Velvet Underground meets the Beach Boys, overseen by their common ancestor Chuck Berry)... "Sexy Sadie" (doo wop meets diva madness)... "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" (the Beau Brummels do "Greensleeves")... "Long, Long, Long" (the Byrds' "Get to You" as rethought by Procol Harum)... "Helter Skelter" (Larry Williams visits Dion & the Belmonts' "I Can't Go On, Rosalie," with bumpkinized Jimi Hendrix accompaniment). Having musically stripmined so mega-much terrestrial acreage, was there anything left for the MopTops to mine but the sky?

We flashed insane grins and shook our heads, muttering WOW after WOW. To call the experience "religious" is to understate the awe we felt in witnessing the most cornucopially profuse, most abundantly generous band rock-roll had known, all but given up for dead, suddenly returning with its greatest and most bountiful work. When the bogue-Caribbean "Ob-La- Di, Ob-La-Da" came on, we rose as one, danced round the room and hugged each other.

After the second play of "Good Night," Ringo's neo-Mantovani masterpiece, we scampered out into the cold, high on more than the hash, and kicked up our heels, feeling (for prob'ly the final time in the Sixties...or ever) a distinct sense of UNLIMITED POSSIBILITY. Even Allen, a mocker who until then hadn't even liked the Beatles, was driven to say, "Well, I guess the object is no longer just to listen, or even memorize — it's for everybody to internalize this shit and SPEAK IT."

We taped the whole thing on an old reel-to-reel recorder. When I woke the next morning, Don, who when the band became Blue Öyster Cult would be known as Buck Dharma (little mister Heavy Metal!), was rewinding and playing a portion of the tape, trying to learn the chords to, of all things, "Mother Nature's Son," playing them back on his guitar. What a beautiful little coda to the occasion... event... happening.

(That's right: an Old War Story. If the world ends tomorrow, at least I've taken one last hike through it.)

The Johnny Stompanato Fan Club

- poor sad
- bo
- zos
- I feel
- soooooo
- bad
- for all the Bobs, Robs, Randys, Mandys, Maggies, marrieds, Marys, Garys, Gabbys, crabbies, Babses, Sabus and Beaus as they all
- LOVE
- one another
- AND
- die

Geezer Music

Joe Callicott, "Fare You Well Baby Blues" (on Mississippi Delta Blues, Vol. 2, Arhoolie CD 402)

Skip James, "I'm So Glad" (on She Lyin', Edsel EDCD 379)

Coleman Hawkins, "Time on My Hands" (on Sirius, Pablo/Original Jazz Classics OJCCD-861-2)

In early 1930, after cutting two sides — a 78 — including the kiss-off classic "Fare Thee Well Blues," Joe Callicott returned to a life of sharecropping punctuated by appearances at Mississippi fish fries and, occasionally, Memphis frolics, not recording again for 37 years.

By then he'd missed out on the "country blues revival" (culminating, for better and worse, in the 1964 Newport Folk Festival), during which a number of long forgotten blues players were exhumed as "folk artists" by entrepreneurs of varying exploitative bents. Not on the "A" list of targeted "rediscoveries," Callicott had to wait until the summer of '67, when he was 65, to record nine songs, six of them released while he was alive, most notably a remake of "Fare Thee Well," this time entitled "Fare You Well Baby Blues."

Slower than the original, its picking less nimble, it's nonetheless a v. passable account of the tune. A snatch of old lyric is dropped ("You got more men than a two-ton truck can haul") and a new line added ("What is you gonna do when your trouble get like mine?"), but the vocal is every bit as strong, with the identical balance of anguish and resignation. There would be no further recordings, and between two and four years later Callicott was no more. (So relatively insignificant was he to even his rediscoverers — and their "folklorist" compeers — that nobody kept close enough tabs on him to know with any accuracy when he died.)

An "A"-lister all the way — he'd cut 18 sides in 1931 (including two — "22-20 Blues" and "Devil Got My Woman" — commonly assumed to have influenced the young Robert Johnson) — the 62-year-old Skip James was one of a dozen-plus bluesmen to play Newport '64, which afforded him access to what biographer Stephen Calt has called "the dreary coffeehouse circuit." It also led to Cream's recording of James's "I'm So Glad," which earned him a larger fistful of coins than sales of his own two albums for Vanguard... the royalties from ALL of which would be devoured by his final hospitalization with cancer (ain't life sublime?).

Four weeks after Newport, just before his body started hurtling down the drain, he recorded the first post-'31 version of "I'm So Glad," and probably the best. (Though superior to the Vanguard take of '65, it would not be released until '93, when he was already dead 24 years.) His guitar work is no great shakes, but he sings some really impassioned shit, maxing out the misery, the distress, in the *non*-falsetto parts, nearly reversing the intensity flow of the '31 original — no mean feat. Has there ever been a performance of a song, any genre, more ABOUT (and from) exhaustion and confusion? (What a thoroughly worldbeaten guy.) And hey, don't "sad" and "mad" rhyme with "glad"? While emotionally scattered, the original had some gladness — this has NONE.

Adolph Sax, a Belgian, created prototypes of the various members of the saxophone family somewhere around 1840, but it wasn't until the second and third decades of the 20th century that anyone anywhere would figure out how to play more than imitation animal sounds, and other comedic "circus" effects, on a single one of

them. Somewhere before 1920, New Orleans jazzman Sidney Bechet performed the deed on soprano sax, followed in the '20s proper by Coleman Hawkins on tenor.

For the next 40 years, Hawkins would be known for a sensuous (often dangerous) muscularity of tone and phrase, a signature warmth emanating from the chest and belly. He had a "sense of the ballad" as advanced, and as simple, as any hornplayer's ever, and was a majestic improviser. According to lore, he was the chronological FIRST to "tell a story" on a saxophone, and as time went by the stories got longer and more intricate. (Check the '39 "Body and Soul," the '45 "Talk of the Town," the '48 "Picasso.")

In 1966, at his last studio session, the phrases at his command for storying are fairly short and unmenacing, and not always perfectly formed (or even sturdy), and they end as often as not with an almost gauzy vibrato like that favored by his acolyte and rival Ben Webster. You can just about hear columns of toneless, pitchless air vibrating, and ceasing to vibrate...sound unto silence.

A minute and a half into "Time on My Hands," the rhythm section drops out, and for the next two minutes-plus, which feel to the listener like five or six or ten — time as perceived being so palpably molded, so altered — the 62-year-old Hawk delivers not so much a story as a valediction. So little breathing time remains, yet time is *his*...micro-duration is macro...all time is NOW. It's not always such a great idea to lean heavily on metaphors, but astro-time implodes, matter too, and Sirius, brightest star in the heavens, becomes a neutron star...a campfire...a matchbook aflame in a skeleton hand. All entropy, all destiny compress the final recitation to a throaty whimper...a final peep. A poignantly MAGNIFICENT peep, but a peep...then neverending stillness.

L15

Nothing I *write* — no sustained *episode* of writing — feels like a winning fight anymore. 15-rounders, all of 'em, and the best I ever do is lose by a split decision.

Sometimes one judge will score it for me by a point or two, if only because he remembers when I had all the moves— and still digs seeing them in flashes — even though they're only simulations now. I shrug when they read his scorecard 'cause I know it's just old sentiment speaking. (If you're not up on these things, I was once a cross between Willie Pep and Cleveland Williams.)

The worst thing about it is I never get KO'ed. It would be a lot healthier: fewer overall punches taken, fewer eyes swoll shut and noses broken, fewer witless displays of

"courage"trapped on the ropes before miraculously clinching. Seems like 20 years since a ref last stepped in and stopped it.

Ooh my soul, do I wish I could fight a 4-round prelim once in a while.

With every sigh, every sneeze, I feel every body shot I've ever taken.

Always

I always stoop down to pick up worms after rain or the runoff from watering lawns or washing cars has trapped them squirming on the pavement, unable to make it back to safe sod whence they came. If they show any signs of life, I move them to a patch of dirt or grass or a cozy heap of wet newspapers...anywhere there's less chance of their being stepped on or dried up by the onslaught of sun.

For as long as I can remember I've done this, and I'm confident I always will.

Important

At this late stage of things, all previous statements aside, it's important to me that I continue to write for one reason alone:BECAUSE IT'S ALL I KNOW. So important is it that if it should kill me, well, that would be OK, at least as causes-o-death go...as long, that is, as I've *finished* whatever I was writing in the process.

Writing has microsquatted to do anymore with "glory" or "craft" or "expression" — none of those are even elements. It's simply SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE, again and again and again, to certain vocational and avocational specifications, something no more significant in and of itself than brushing my teeth, or shopping for groceries, or changing a light bulb...a *grander* version of those things, perhaps, but really only the *eensiest* jot less prosaic an ACTIVITY. Whether being so fixated, so hooked, on something so wearing and tearing — and at the same time so intrinsically notmuch — constitutes a good habit or a bad habit is of no concern to me, though I'll concede that "objectively" it's prob'ly a verrry bad habit (worse than Copenhagen!)...s merely *my* habit. My filthy, dirty, bloody TERMINAL CALLING.

Somebody's Favorite Song, Ever

The Del-Vikings' "Come Go with Me."

Complete

Image of a tombstone on my left forearm: I'm now complete. Tattoo for each forearm, one for each shoulder — complete for now.A finite, if prolonged, work in progress, begun 8/69, finished 10/99. Should a falling piano land on my head, I'm set.

If only in this one regard, right now I feel something quite like peace— and a sense of life-mission accomplished— far more than if I'd had another ten books published. As Hegel said somewhere down the line, the Absolute unfolds itself — and all my writing put together, Absolutely, as both mission and accomplishment, becomes as nothing beside my four tattoos in equilibrium.

Since I drilled none of these into my skin, nor did more than suggest slight changes in the design of a couple (a nail-polished hand reaching upward from foliage beside the stone; full genital peek-a-boo for “Ruby,” babe-in-residence on my right shoulder), I'm more their canvas than contriver, their consumer than author, yet they comprise the sole body of work I will take, literally, to the grave with me.

For the moment now my body, as home, as baggage, as tabula no-longerrasa, feels stable, and I feel whole and undivided. This will change soon enough, when the death of my cat impels me to have his likeness, or some generic cat-face w/ teeth fiercely bared, drawn and drilled on my inner right forearm, thus requiring a symmetrical follow-up toot sweet...before, anyhow, the baby grand flattens me.

Symmetry...sheez.

Now that I'm no longer a Platonist, nor any kind of monist or especially an idealist, I wonder: why does such hoohah obsess me?

Forever

I absolutely do not wanna live forever.

If I somehow got to live a THOUSAND TIMES, ha, it'd take some weird, unforeseeable lunacy (at age 56 and up) to make me fantasize stretching it even ONCE beyond the bounds of a single lifetime, a timecoded unit existence.

The Attics of My Life

I've lived in plenty of buildings with basements, but I've never had an attic.

Back when I was a really, really, really stupid kid, long before I ever got laid, I used to dream of kissing a girl, on the lips but dryly, in an attic.

The first gal with whom I had even rudimentary sex, and would go on to have full-boogie intercourse, invited me to play with her one afternoon, while her parents watched TV, up in her suburban attic. It was summer, and so hot it made perfect

sense to take our pants off, and she let me finger her, but she wouldn't let me stick my finger in...that other place.

Have I given this torrid day a moment's thought since?

Why do I now?

“The Good Fight”

All good fights, so-called — “gallant endeavors” — are good or gallant only as long as you want to endure them, as long as you in some sense *enjoy fighting and/or endeavoring*. Once the whambang ritual itself gets to be superfluous or pointless or exorbitant, it becomes a futile waste of breath like any other...a bullshit masochistic RIFF...a birthday-suited chump's aerobic convulsion. Nobody needs more scar tissue.

Well, maybe scarification artists need it, but the universe doesn't need one more work of high-booty art, or one more conscientious

artist.

Unfinished Play

SCENE ONE

JOSETTE. Pass the potatoes.

LOOOOIE. Yeah, sure.

JOSETTE. (Glares at Looooie.)

LOOOOIE. Fuck you.

SCENE TWO

JOSETTE. You're a big fucking dope.

LOOOOIE. *You're* a pigfucking dope.

JOSETTE. I said “big fucking dope.”

LOOOOIE. You're that too.

JOSETTE. Actually, you are a pig-fucking dope.

SCENE THREE

A large clear-glass bowl of potato salad on

Last Will 'n' Test

- if the flies want me
- let the flies have me
- if I stink too bad
- take drastic action

— *Richard Meltzer*

Richard Meltzer is the author of a dozen books, including a novel, *The Night (Alone)*, and the collection *A Whore Just Like the Rest: The Music Writings of Richard Meltzer*, which earned him the 2001 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

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Best Of

Too Carlsbad for Words

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

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Carlsbad

Cover Stories



Batiquitos Lagoon



I don't listen to the cops,

I wish they all were dead.

— The Dils, "Sound of the Rain," by longtime Carlsbad residents Chip and Tony Kinman

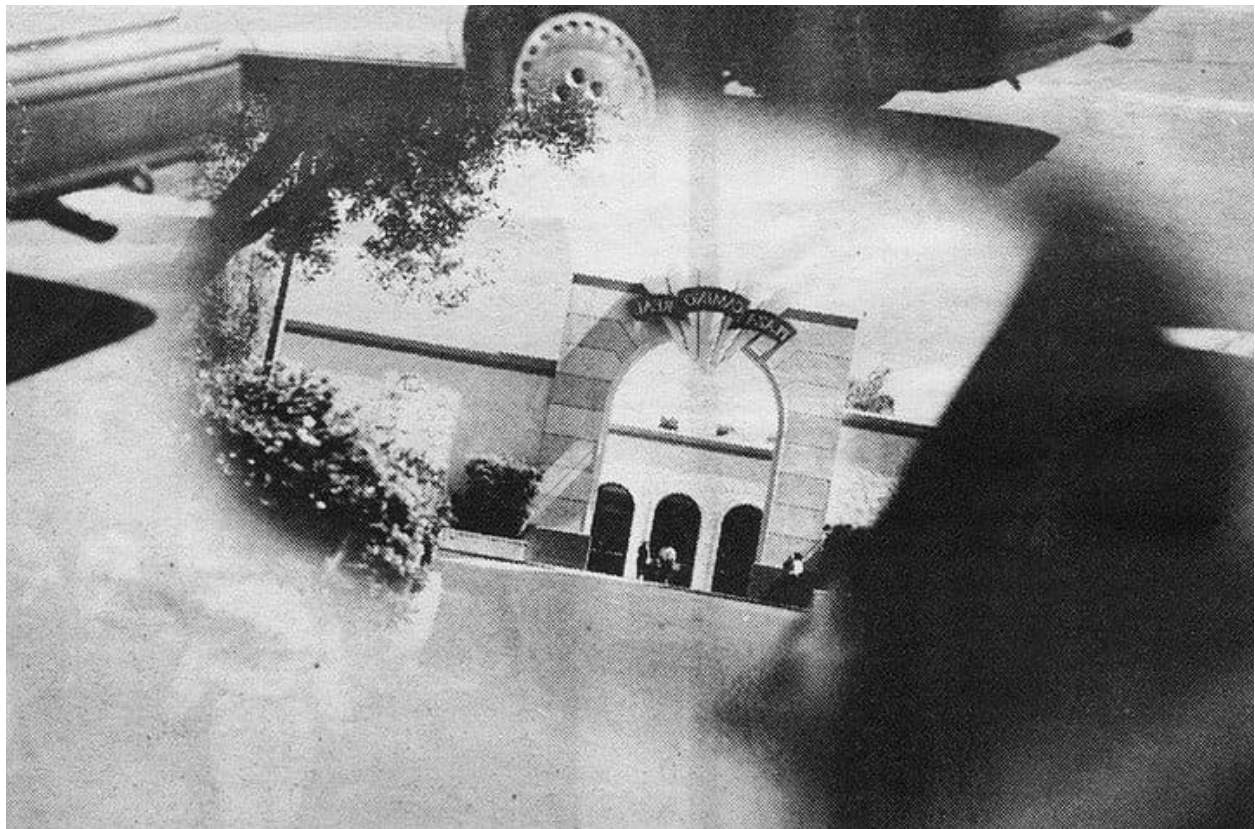
Do as I do, do *exactly* as I do and load up, gas up, check coolant, tires, oil, bring along someone you love, like or at least c'n stand being with for 48 hours (consec.), get on 5, drive, get off at Elm Ave. at 2:30, 3:00 on a Friday p.m., go west till it ends, park, unload, lock and check into room two five oh of the Ocean Manor Motel. Fully open curtains, ogle the fantastic sea view, piss, flush, unpack and go down for a drink. But before you go drink go and check out the beach, down the railed three- or four-leveled stairway a fringe with flowering ice plants, over pebbles as large as your fist to the sandy strip (narrow) dissolving in seasmist to far left and right, note the bearded old cuss in the bathrobe with two empty teacups, the bracing aroma of ocean and whatwhat, whatsthis... izzit sewage? Seepage? Something seeping from a pipe, a drain, dribbling a stream under pebbles to sand ...go investigate. But your partner's socks feel wrong, she mus' change and change now to the more comfy "walking kind" — back to roomsville.

As she's changing don't forget to see a great big pelican fly by, left to right, tell her, "Look — a pelican," then she looks and it's gone — "Sure it wasn't a seagull?" Listen to the airconditioner hum, um, there is none — notice overhead fan — 'tis the Sound of Sea, no escaping it. Then you realize you ain't hid your cash yet, so hide it. Hide it deep in the bran flakes you've brought to assist in your unending fight with the dread Constipation. Although I don' know, maybe that's not a great place — not finding money can work up a hunger, they'll open the cupboard, say, "Fuggit, let's have some *flakes*" — but then money's not everything, walking is, so get out and walk, walk, it's good for the heart, lungs and pancreas.

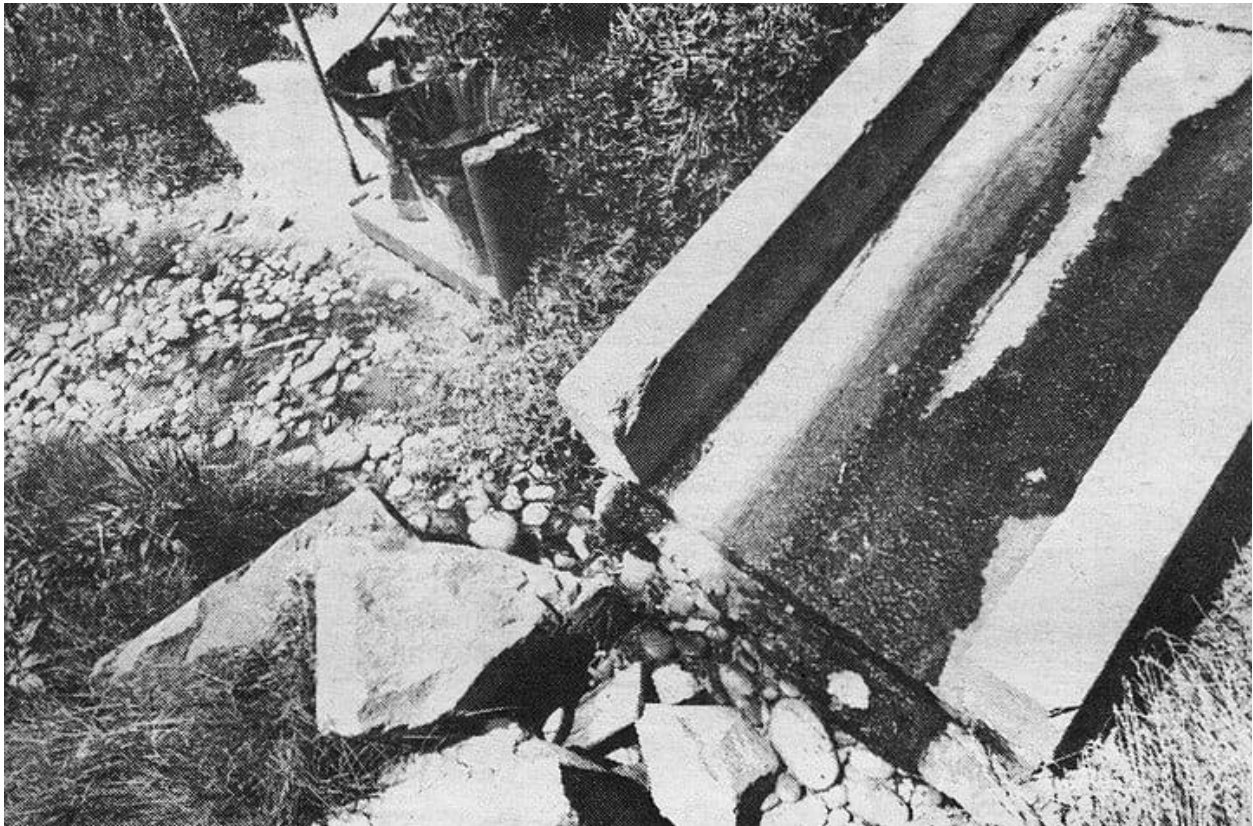
Go north a ways up Carlsbad Blvd. — briskly — to Fisherman's Supply Center, peek but don't go in, 10,000 rods at stiff attention, right on Grand, past the bus stop at which wait weary Hispanics in work duds & ball caps to Ralph and Eddie's Card Room — Lo-Ball & Pan — Cocktails, Entertainment. 'Cept for battered old rugs on the wall — rugs?? — and a threesome of oldos in the card room per se, it's anybar, any youth person bar, you've ever been in. Young Friday bozos on barstools, bartender no more than 30, ultraloud juke, tape or disc, contempo-anonymous rockroll etcetera. Get a couple Buds, Bud Lights, that seems like, wait, no, on tap, Miller Genuine Draft, okay, make it two Millers. Drink up, tip the guy a buck, no, less, scram, proceed to the station.

Station? *Train*, you dumb tourist, Amtrak. Follow the tracks, you can't miss it. A neat but not natty middle aged couple — a fine pair o' "squares" — will greet you, hand you a mint copy of the latest issue of *Carlsbad Mag*, a fine hunk of slick, direct your attention to a chalkboard on which appear TIMES (approx.) at which trains en route from Del Mar to Oceanside, or Oceanside to Del Mar, will pass, NOT STOP, as no train has stopped here since 1957. Within seconds, voil&, toot! toot! — though the station clock, correct, says oh NO it couldn' be. "Might be a freight," sez your unruffled host/male, everyone wait, fidget... "Yes! here's our freight now" — wouldn't you know. "Be sure to catch the Showstoppers" — catch 'em if you know what's good f'r you— "kind of like Up With People, inspiring, at the mall at six" — write that down.

Time's a-wasting, better eat quick, soon, go to that eyesorish fake? restored? neo-Victorian uggle at Elm and Carlsbad with one, two, three flags (U.S., Canada, Calif.; no Mexico), get there so early, so quick, they have no other choice but to turn you away — no dinner till five. Twelve minutes to kill, walk, keep walking, admire the kittens, piggies and puppies in antique-store windows, ceramic mini-mammals, metal mammals — the town's lousy with 'em — and in a joint called How Wood You Like It?, wood mammals (including whales). On a phone pole: LOST CAT — REWARD — \$100 — be sure 'n' jot the number: career opportunities in today's Carlsbad!



Return to the uggie, Neiman's, circle and search but not too hard for any previously invisible Mex flags, find none, consider the absence strange but not too strange, enter, be seated, take in the decor. Approve of the revealed "gazebo-like" structure of the high wooden ceiling, snicker at the proffered assortment of crayons and paper tablecloth, register genuine surprise upon sighting no (as rumored) Leroy Neiman graphics, sneer at cloth flowers (yellow, white) that do look real combined with nonflowering leafgreen realies, have severely divided opinions 'bout the taped sappy music. Order (you: shark, an Anchor Steam; she: monkfish, chardon-nay), get served, eat, review aloud as follows: shark: "Moist, okay"; monkfish: "I like it. It's reminiscent, urn, has a definite pseudo-lobster feel to it. But I like the potatoes most, the red skins. I'm using sauce on them instead of on the fish. And the salad is excellent." Debate, also as follows, the nature of the orange-ish mash left relatively untouched on each plate: "Carrots?" "Could be soap." "Soup?" "Not bad soap, good soap." "I think it's squash." Draw ants together in orange and black until the check comes, sigh at the piercing unexpected sound of a lonesome train whistle, when the piano player comes on, leave.



Get the car, check your map, can't do this on foot, Carlsbad's only mall (as such) is too far to hoof it, too long a trek with a Showstoppers show on the line. Don't speed

though, buckle up, en route you'll meet streets with prez names — Washington, Roosevelt, Madison, Jefferson, Harding, Monroe — did someone say Harding? — then finally, short drive, Plaza Camino Real. Park, unbuckle, rush, you don't wanna miss a note or step by these fannntastic sillysillies from Valley Jr. High — they grow 'em silly early in Carl's Bad, or so it would seem. And the growers, dig *them*: moms/dads with a certain grimly manicured, overmanicured, OK, call it what it 'tis, an unmistakable ORANGE COUNTY MIEN if you know what I mean. First whiff, first trace you've encountered of O.C. so far (may it only be the last — knock wood!) — lifeless life preparing for deathless death — in San Diego County, who'd've believed? Stop believing & watch the show, the 'Stoppers, carefully watch and be glad you ain't them, yowee!, not even friends (just fam'ly) would attend such a grand hokeroo. "Baby Face" w/ lotsa jumping— up down around — withhold your applause as this is some my-t-lame "shit." It pays not to encourage such whatsafugga — babes in tinsel auditioning for 1946 June Allyson pics — it does, it really does. So run do not walk, SCRAM from the premises (and never come back).

At which point you'll need a dwink so get a dwink, go dwinking. Scoot back t' Ocean Manor, park, go up for some bran bucks, which haven't been stole yet, "It works," says your consort, whose idea it was in the first place. At the Alley on Grand she asks the barkeep: "Is Campari good for your stomach?" "I'd have a blackberry brandy," he says, she thinks a sec, then has one. Jameson's for you, straight, but even with you can't forget the mall men. *Fathers more painted-looking than mothers, you think, made from the same material as manikins. Man-i-kin, kin to man, but kin as well to* — "Bartender," she says, interrupting your inner b.s., "this is sticky," meaning her glass, which he diligently, surgically removes the yick from, but obsessed she requests a brand new glass and gets one. Same brandy. "Where you from?" asks a seated bystander who has witnessed this sequence. "The reason I ask," she says, and you'll be glad to hear it, "is people come here and I tell them it's not La Jolla, not-Rancho Santa Fe, this is more country. Here you should expect dirty glasses."

Mine is clean though — whoops — *yours* is. Spotless. Broad, a realtor, tells you she's "not trying to sell you something, but it's a nice town. I've been here four years. This bar used to be just this section here" — the size/shape of your closet turned sidevyise; now it's the size of your 8-car garage — "the only entrance was there. Which is how they named it the Alley." The everhorrible "Wind in My Wings," vocal by whoever the fuck, comes over the juke. "Oh, that song!" chirps your guide to things Carlsbad. "My daughter sang it at open house. It was her way of saying, you know, *parental* love and support — that's the wind in her wings. It brought tears to my eyes." "Did you see the movie?" asks your brandied paramour. "Which movie?" "Beaches. Bette Midler sings it." "Ooh, I'll have to rent it." You haven't seen it and

never will. Struggling with the gloppiness of her beverage itself, Brandy beseeches the bartender for water — “I was wondering when you’d get around to that.” While he’s still there the Alley’s luckiest mom asks: “Have the Newhoffer” — Newhauser? Dewhauser?— “twins been in lately?” “Didn’t you hear? I kicked them out for fighting, had to ban them. Hennessey’s has banned them too.”

Your cue to split for Hennessey’s, where’s Hennessey’s?, don’t ask, y’won’t find, stumble upon and settle for Dooley’s instead, Dooley McCluskey’s. Settle in, settle over a tall, cool 22-oz. black & tan in a beerglass the size of your beagle, enough for both of you. If it was Happy Hour, but ‘tain’t so fug-git, you’d get to KEEP THE GLASS but what would you do with it? Throw it, drop it, maybe kick it — you’re better off w/out it. Drink, drink up, notice the semblance of Dooley’s logo to the L.A. Dodger logo, resemblance, the cooper/wood tabletops, the inverted 22-ouncers strung over the bar, hanging plants like used to signify “fern bar” — now they just signify “bar” — clientele like some sort of hick-yuppie Santa Barbara. En route to the men’s room, overhear and enjoy this groovy boy-girl colloquy: “You’re a big fucking dope.” “You’re a pig-fucking dope.” “I said ‘big fucking dope.’ ” “You’re that too.” “Actually, you are a pig-fucking dope.” A refill and g’bye.

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Hello, Day at a Time Bookstore, closed. Greetings — c’mon, say *it* — to Richard’s Art Frames & Gift Shop, same. Hi there, Kink’s Full Service Hair Salon, ditto. Howdy, Up Your Alley — easy to misread, but don’t, as Up Yours Always — a boutique. Howzit hangin’, Fisherman’s Supply Center, still abuzz with rods, bait & nuthing at ten-thirty pee-yem. Good evening, fuchsia wildflowers at Elm and Roosevelt. Yo, local patrol heat actively harassing no one: Dils, wherever in heck you guys may presently be. Hi ho! forlorn deserted Carlsbad — a peaceful, sleepy placelikeanywhereelse. Anywhereelse, that is, that’s peacefulsleepy at Fridaynotyeteleven. Still one place to go.

The sea, the byootiful... not in but near. By. No swim tonight, no close encounter w/cold lapping foam — just a brief short walk upon damp dark halfmoonlit rocks and sand, capped off with some snappy weekend dialogue, to which your mate should contribute the lion’s share, as close as poss. to:



"Well, I'd rather not contemplate the vastness of the ocean, it just seems too dangerous, I guess because of the power, I don't necessarily see that as beautiful."

"What's it gotta do with beautiful or not beautiful?"

"Well, it seems to me that when people come to the ocean they smell all that stuff and look at it and feel some *connection* to it, but I see it as very capricious. There's something not to trust about nature, that's for sure. I just prefer to think it doesn't exist, that its power, well, they call it 'Mother Nature,' right? What kind of parenting is that — that can only damage?"

"How 'bout calling it 'Bad Brother Nature,' or 'Black Sheep Uncle Nature?' "

"All I'm saying is if you contemplate that stuff you have to contemplate the dangerousness — that it could swallow you up any time."

"Isn't that part of the appeal?"

"To who?"

"To anybody?"

"The appeal to me is the romance of it." "Yeah, well that's exactly what I... "

"For instance, if you walk along the beach and there's some light there because man has put light there."

"How 'bout moonlight?"

"Moonlight is not enough. I'm very glad there's some light and it's somewhat calm. In its calmness it allows you to exist. And within the calm and the nice sound and the lights you can have romance, also the smell, the nice... "

"Smell?"

"I do like the smell."

"That isn't dangerous?"

"The smell's not dangerous."

"How about the wetness?"

"Well, I may not care for it, but it's not life-threatening."

"So what you're really saying is going to the beach is like flying in a plane?"

"Are you talking about day or night?"

"It doesn't matter, it's the same..."

"Okay, yes, it's a risk. It's a definite risk. I definitely would have to educate myself as to what there is to appreciate. And I can, I know there are certain sensorial treats, but it's not worth... see, even the concept of weather. I like it when the sunny nice days, a little nice rain, but not tornadoes or earthquakes or...there's just no end to the fragileness."

Contemplate having sex. Return to rm. 250.

I hate the rich,

They should dig the ditch.

— The Dils, "I Hate the Rich"

Get up, help Mandy remove her sponge, peep through the curtains at high tide and ominous clouds. Get your Health Valley Oat Bran, find some bowls in the cupboard and spoons in the drawer, get your milk from the fridge, shit, you forgot to buy it las' night. No problem, dress, sprint to Royal Palms Spirits and also get beer, get some Guinness and Carlsbad, 'scuse me, Carlsberg, and a Bering cigar. Chow down, relax, read Thursday's *Carlsbad Journal*, that front-page pic of the guy getting four stitches in his finger at Tri-City Medical Center, the piece about rubble on the north shore of Agua Hedionda Lagoon (somethin' to see), and hype for Sunday's book fair.

Share a beer, bring a sweater, motor south along the coast, Carlsbad Bl. as it jogs right, 101, whatever you wanna call it, passing joggers jogging the walk overlooking the sea, see the Encina power plant loom, gloomy, its horsedick stack as grim as the

sky but not earth grim, primate grim, nobody needs sun as a forcible daily prop but this stack jus' don't make it. Sand invades your path, blows under your wheels like smoke, like low-level fog, ethereal, spooky, "surreal," urn, yes, *lovely*. 'Cross the road from the plant a house or something sits (stands) covered by one of those exterminator tents, broadly striped, grey and navy. A strip of campground whizzes by — South Carlsbad State Beach, "Full" — prompting Mandy to muse, "I can see why it's full. I suppose if you're camping it would be ideal, though I'd never wanna go camping — it doesn't make sense. It's cold, there could be little animals, crawling bugs." Tell her jokingly (but try hard to sound sincere), "I thought next time we'd go camping ourselves."



Shit, in the gloom & loveliness you missed your lagoon, forgot to hang a left at Hedionda, don't repeat the oversight with Batiquitos, the lagoon you've heard got drained and *stinks* — turn off at La Costa Ave. and check it out. No, NO! Don't go to La Costa, *into* La Costa — land of golf and pus — or you will cry CRY, or at least wince, for the whole damn human Race (and its Condition). Nostrils flared, circumnavigate the sump, the swamp, whiff, sniff, 'tain't so awful after all, at worst like somebody peed on the floor, not even one that's had time to ripen, fresh pee —

or faintly pungent sink or tub mold. So who told you it stinks? Was it D—h M-----
---s?

Enough smelling, time to find some baseball. Or even softball. Drive into one of those hilly anonymous shit-rich tract neighborhoods that proliferate these days in southeastern Carlsbad, any one, first one that spurs Mandy to ask, “Whudda you think people do who live here?” to which you reply, “Same as rich people anywhere — exploit the rest of the world,” and up a street in this one development where street signs have curvycurl letters so H’s look like K’s, K’s look like R’s, you will find it: girls’ little league. Westar Properties Panthers vs. the Hoffman Planning Dynamite Dolphins, purple vs. pink. Score as you join it is something like 20–12, second inning — a real barnburner. Any contact is generally a hit; most infield grounders are good for two bases. With the bases loaded a thin blonde 10-year-old swings wildly at an equally wild pitch, strike two. “Hang in there, sweetie,” shouts her ultra-supportive coach, “be *aggressive*.” Swings aggressively at the next pitch, which lands two feet in front o’ the plate, inning over. Cries like a 4-year-old! ... Nothing makes your day like a good, stiff dose of national pastime.

All good must pass, howev, and in this case quickly, as she then forces you, Mandy, not the crier, to drive inside La Costa so be ready. If you look, you get cancer — inoperable FACE cancer — so don’t look, don’t see, see NO MORE THAN a couple-three golf bags and some golf clothes and a Cadillac parked between a Bentley and a Volvo and otherwise nothin’. For that much you’ll prob’ly get thumb cancer, which is curable. If detected early, and w/ competent professional removal, chances are you’ll live. ‘S okay, though, to ogle the fat dead grey cat as you exit onto Camino Real, north, and observe living Hispanic migrant laborers here, there and everywhere on the way, on your way, to lunch.

Hungry? You’d better be. Because I know a place that is ready and willing to stuff your big rainyday gut. Did I say able? And able. The Armenian Cafe, (619) 720-CAFE, two shakes of a lamb’s wad from Ocean Manor — park & walk. Walk quick. ‘S raining but stand there, north Cafe wall, and read every syllable of Carlsbad’s finest hand-painted sign:

WE HAVE THE

BEST

ICE CREAM

IT HAS:

NO SUGAR

NO DAIRY

NO FAT (not yogurt) and

only 20 calories per ounce

Deee.....leicious

Enter, wipe your face with' a napkin or sleeve and sit in the front part, the windowed porch part — a nice oldfashioned building with a porch. A porch that slopes. Don't get ice cream yet, order falafel, a gyros/sha-warma omelet, coffee and ice tea.

"Rain," says your waitress, "is good. I hate when it's nice out and I'm working in here." Watch a hundred good droplets collect on your pane. Hear the noonday midday train whistle by.

When the food comes, lemme think a second ... okay, eat it. The falafel, eat that with your hands — the pita — and the omelet, urn, let's see, a fork and spoon should do it — or a fork and a knife. Examine your food before eating it, making damnsure your falafel contains shredded lettuce, sliced tomato and sauce, and the omelet has its full complement of onions, peppers, cheese, mushrooms (meat patties on the side), carefully *check* side dishes— rice pilaf, *check*, feta cheese, *check*, cottage fries, *check* — then proceed to "pig out" — pretend you both was pigs in the sty. If you've got room left for ice cream, you're a bigger pig than I.



When the rain clears, well, now here's an idea, you can go for a walk. See what's left to SEE, see it with pleasure don't the word, SEE! (for instance) California Sportsphoto, SEE! Pharaoh's Egyptian Imports, SEE! Arthur A. Brown Plumbing, SEE! woman w/ a parakeet on her shoulder, SEE! Dream Kitchen & Bath Company, SEE! Dragmaster Auto Repair, SEE! poodle being clipped in the window of Klassi Kritters Pet Salon, SEE! Village Guntrader — "Yes, We're Open!" — with its framed pics of bear, elk, et cetera (shooting suggestions), SEE! (even though it's boring) McFadden's Antiques. And when you're done seeing go back to your room, rest, shower, lie around, watch *Meatballs III* until the signal goes off, both the picture and sound, call the front desk and be told, "It's Carlsbad Cable — the whole town is out," look up Hennessey's in the phone book, lie around, brush your respective teeth, fall asleep reading *La Maison de Rendez-vous* and *Tender Is the Night*

But don't let things get too tender, too cozy, you've got too big an evening ahead. Between 7:12 and 7:13 rise, shake a leg, I think you should shave for this. Hennessey's Tavern, 2777 Roosevelt St., deserves your cleanshaven chin, cheeks, lip and jowls. And neck. And check in the mirror to make sure your sideburns're even. Hennessey's: a big wide well-lit airy place. Tigers-White Sox on five TV's. Fanlike machine on the far wall, not a rotating fan but six tandem hand fans, a-fanning. Scan

the menu, order in dribs and drabs, and with each order (and in between) get two black & tans with “separation.” The Guinness, until it settles, sits on top, distinct from the paler suds on bottom. Drinking these muthas should work up a thirst, er, an appetite, for which I recommend: Fuzzy Navel peach pie, corned beef and cabbage, Irish nachos. Irish whuh? Nachos with sliced spuds in place of tortilla chips — they’re yummilicious. Next table over, a guy reading the Blade–Citizen reads aloud, suddenly so aloud you turn ‘round, make eye contact. Conversation ensues; continues. At an opportune moment, ask: “Do you know the Dewhofner twins by any chance?”

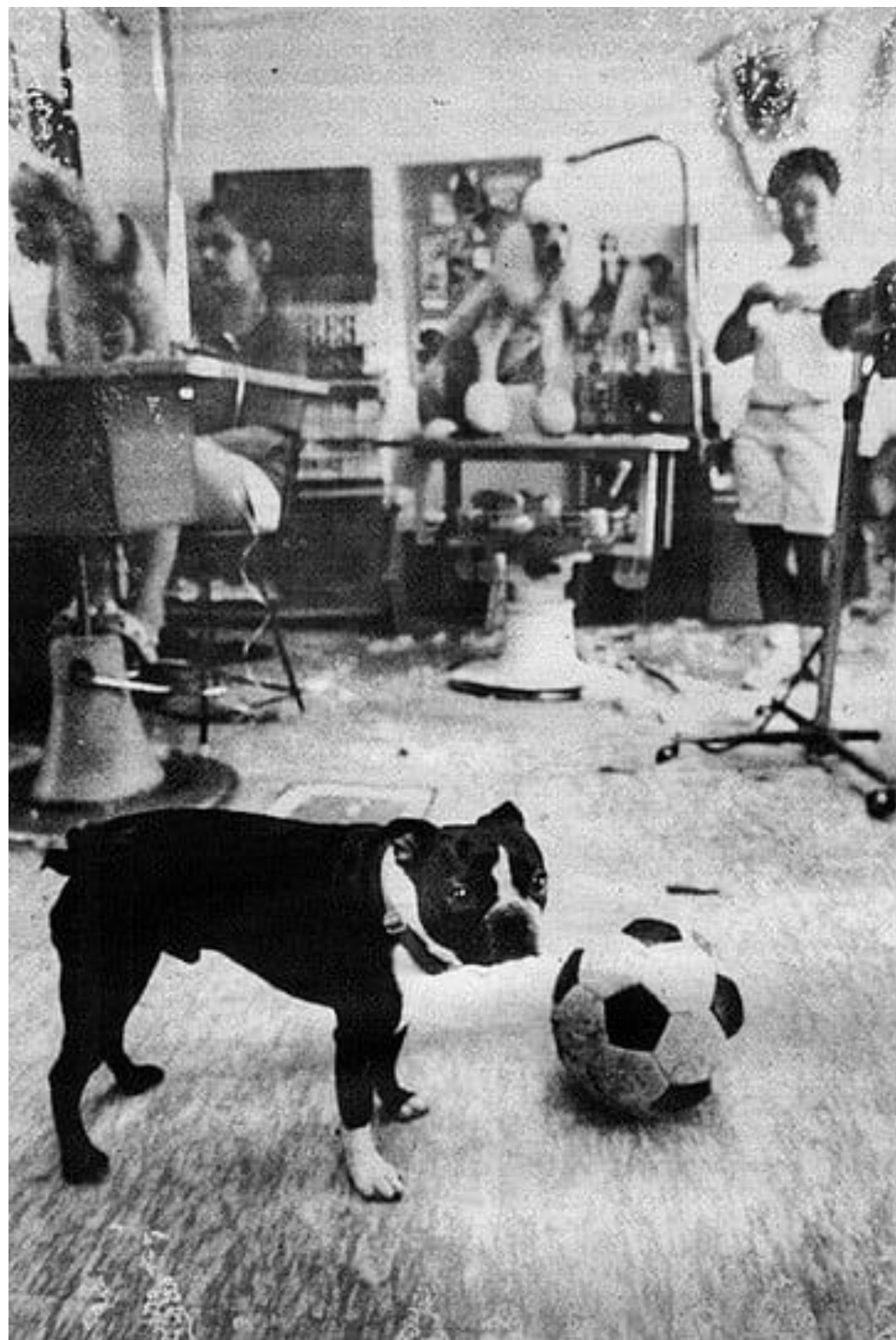
“No.” “How ‘bout the Newcrofters?” “Doesn’t ring a bell, but say it to *this* ear, I don’t hear too good with the right. Construction accident, Oceanside, fell 32 feet straight onto my back. Cracked my head, back, broke ten ribs, lost my spleen. Got 30 thousand, shoulda hired a lawyer, I’d made 100 thousand easy. Which is nothing compared to what this lady’s gonna make when she. sues, the one in Vista whose husband got his head blown in by deputies. Said he was backing his pickup in a threatening manner, hard to figure why they’d, wasn’t even a Mexican. What was that name again?” “I dunno, Newsofter, Dowfoster. Heard they got 86’ed here recently.” “I don’t know them. Can’t be Hennessey’s regulars. I’m in here practically every night.”

Maisy’s tired so take her back, let her sleep. Shamble down the freezybreezy beach, pass 10–12 couples, only couples, one couple fucking (or something) under a towel. Walk south, light up your cigar, compose second-rate beach haikus, or pseudo-haikus, such as

Crickets in the ice plants,

The air wets white.

Tug boldly on your Bering, stink up the night. Feel like a million, a thousand, bucks.



What are the types of services offered by the Carlsbad Post Office? The list is extensive and all the details fill two weighty volumes that must be memorized by window clerks during their brief training period. Customers do not need to learn all the options, just the window-service hours. These are: 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

— “It’s in the Mail,” Carlsbad Magazine, May 1990

If you have an itch to gamble, check out the Trauma Intervention Program Casino Nite beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Jazzer-cise Center on 2208 Roosevelt St. For a donation at the door, you’ll receive \$200 in play money to gamble on roulette, blackjack, poker and horse racing.

— “Around Carlsbad,” Carlsbad Journal, May 17, 1990

R-r-r-ring ding goes your wake-up call, manythings t’ do before you’re outa here. First, foremost, gotta break your fast, ain’t et nothing in 12-13 hours: consume or perish. For sustenancial relief, affordable, flavorful, I suggest Mariah’s, 377 Elm Avenoo. Don’t let the “family style” mumbojumbo throw you, this smallish town prenoon cuisinery is the berries. You can’t go wrong with the ortega/chorizo omelet (2nd best aig dish you will ever eat, or even meet), french toast and bacon for the broad, a couple OJ’s and some joe. Sufficient bodyfuel to carry you through this sunniest of sun days. (All Sundays are sunny — it’s the law or something.)

THE VASTNESS BY DAY – Up for some more beach? More beach. Tall green bamboo stalks... billion-dollar seahomes... black dots that might just be dolphins... squirrel on the seawall... raven with a lizard in its beak, camcordered by a woman with a Sony F30 ... and Mamie’s final sea meditation: “I don’t really think there’s much difference between sitting here watching the waves and sitting at a laundromat watching the machines go round and round. Like if they had these patterns that you played in a video, different ones over and over again, and this is like the wave disc and there’s the clothes-drier disc — both are repetitive and both are compelling in their way. But there’s a big part left out: the vastness of the wind, which by day I’d say is perfectly acceptable, and the feel on your skin and all of that. And that is a *hundred times better* than the laundromat.”

TWO-FIFTY FAREWELL — Dishes that aren't yours, wash. Dishes that are, well you didn't bring any. Admire for the v. last time the benign nineteenfiftiesness (-sixtiesness) (fortiesness) of the admirable decor, esp. the large framed print of lemon yellow mums in a vase. Pack up your oat bran and underwear. Kiss the carpet of the finest room with a seaview and stove you have ever licked clitoris in. Say g'bye to the dead moth and golf tee which since Friday (at least) have been guests in your door-sill. *Boo hooooo.*

THE CITY THAT READS TOGETHER BLEEDS TOGETHER — 'S in Holiday Park near the freeway so catch it, the Book Fair. You will not buh-lieve the incredible turnout. Without guns or broken bottles at their head, every live, animate Carlsbadian under 200 will ostensibly BE THERE, and it couldn't be simply for the baked goods, the clown, or even the oompah band — it's quite possible, even probable, that most or at least many of these people readabook now and then. And you read, right? So grab a carton, take your time, and score barely beat hardcovers of *Madame Bovary*, *Our Lady of the Flowers*, the British first printing of *Portnoy's Complaint*, Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, George Higgins' *The Digger's Game* and Larry Merchant's *National Football Lottery*, each just a buck, Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows*, 50 cents, and the Penguin paperback of *Candide* for a quarter. As they say in Chicago, a steal.



BETTER THAN STUMP FALLS, NEBRASKA — Home in your living cell, think about and see if you agree with me: That in five years' time (or less) it may be one enormous mall like anywhere else, but right this sec Carlsbad remains a somewhat charming, not unbearable Small Town/U.S.A. in a fair number of non-pejorative senses of the term. It's authentically primitive, it's systematically unguarded, proud of its own basic nothingness, it's in any event pre-Master Program in ongoing self-surmise. It is, I'm sure you'll admit, friendlier to tourist scum than virtually anywhere else its size you've ever been. It ain't especially fond of Mexicans, perhaps, but then neither is Stump Falls, Nebraska. All in all, Carlsbad is a generally *nice place*. And a not unbearable nice place adjacent to Vastness cannot be beat. (Tell me if you agree.)

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Best Of

The heart of sleaze

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Sept. 3, 1992](#)

Feature Stories

The bookstore “pop-up” for Niek Tosches’s *Ditto: Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams* reads: “The Great American Show Biz Story — Straight Up with a Hark Twist” — and dark it is. Darker than umber, darker than George Bush’s heart at 12:09 a.m. This is the book that deconstructs, now and forever, any and all distinctions between love and money, an and shit. It’s also, beyond the shadow of an etc., the finest celebrity bio ever writ. Gertrude Stein’s Picasso might lx- number two. But that was only 50 pages. This one is 548.

Dean’s in it — natch — as are Jem”, Frank, JFK, RFK, and Dodo Marmarosa, the piano player on Charlie Parker’s “Moose the Moochc,” “Ornithology,” and “Yardbird Suite.” So are Skinny D’Amato, Ruta Lee. Anthony Franciosa, Ray Walston, Jimmy the Greek’s half sister, Thalmus Rasulala, and Honor Blackman. Irene Forrest isn’t, not in the main text, but she docs get a hearty thankvou in the acknowledgments.

Nick Toschcs (rhymes with “galoshes”) is the best goddam writer I know. Can you think of anyone better? Um.uh...time’s up — you can’t. Credits include: Hellfire, Cut Numbers, Power on Earth, Unsung Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll, and that great piece about “men’s groups” Penthouse hasn’t printed vet.

On a day like today, seems like only yesterday, him and me got t’gether and I asked him some stuff.

Q: Basically, I think this is a rare book that actually takes the position, in a serious manner, that sleaze is as relevant a focal point as alary — and even this shall pass.

A: I would go along with that. 'Cause to me it's like mediocrity is the greater part of glory.

Q: But I mean even like, like with Dean you've got even the phase of things where it is nothing but sleaze, even that has no ultimate staying power.

A: Right. Nothing is forever. Like Heraclitus — everything flows.

Q: Ton've got a guy here, as opposed to what the L.A. Times reviewer said, where here's a

singularly uninteresting guy, you've got a character who more than anybody I've ever read in a bio, a history, uh, in any non-fiction book that deals with somebody's life — here's a guy who just absolutely encapsulates the notion of, y'know, that the difference between something and nothing is nothing.

A: I agree with that, I mean to me Dean represented, he still represents, a great many things. How many of them are intentional, how many of them are intrinsic, it's difficult to say. But he certainly is an important figure.

Q: He's somebody who actually has a grasp of the meaninglessness of it all.

A: Which is probably the rarest quality, uh, in humanity. Of all the philosophers I've ever read, the only one that spoke of that was this guy Nicholas of Cusa, this medieval guy, where he said stupidity is the greatest thing which we can attain — realizing how stupid and meaningless we are.

Q: Tcah, but let's say you got people who glimpsed that in the short run, like Jim Morrison, but he didn't make it to 2S, and here's Dean in his

70s.

A: Seventy this past June. So maybe, at this point, since Dean is pretty much a total recluse, if he had said dumb, profound things all his life he'd lk considered to have taken a monastic, Taoist silence at this point, but instead the things he said were never pretentious.

Q Right. So in fact his silence is just, y'know, proof that, uh, that even wisdom can't save you. A: I guess so. But it got him to 75, which is more than, farther than it got Elvis, than it got Jim Morrison. And I also think it's nobler for him to be silent at 75 than it is for Sinatra to be singing.

Q Well I think you did a great, uh, Sinatra has a great secondary presence in the book, and certainly Jerry Lewis.

A: Well with Frank I was just basically recounting what I had seen, the picture of him that I'd seen, he's a guy that I've never really had that much direct interest in. When I met

Jerry he was like, y'know, an extremely interesting character — I'd never really met anybody quite like him, in that he went through at least three distinct personalities, all within a span of hours. He was like the Telethon Jerry, the King of Comedy Jem', the loving Jerry, the less loving Jerry, and who knows?

Q How'd his hair smell?

A: I didn't really smell the man, but it looked fine.

Q It wasn't so aromatic you could smell it across the room ?

A: No.

Q: So you saw him on his boat?

A: Yeah, he has a boat called Sam's Place, which had been custom-built for Mr. Gillette of Gillette razors. It's the kind of boat you can't buy anymore, it's all made out of wood, and all the other millionaire boats, the yachts that were docked in the marina there, were all fiberglass. J e was the granddaddy of San Diego's millionaire boat people.

Q Why did he moor the thing in San Diego as opposed to L.A. ?

A: I think it was basically because he lives in Las Vegas, no (Kean there, so he probably, for some reason he preferred San Diego. I didn't ask him, 'cause I figured I had so few hours with the great man that I wanted to keep him on the Dino stuff.

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Q: While I was reading the book I rented *The Caddy* and *Artists and Models*. And the thing I was hoping, 'cause it had been so many years since I saw this stuff—and you make the great point rather quickly in the Dean and Jerry section, where you say, "Perhaps we should consider the possibility that this stuff wasn't funny..." A: Yeah. Something like that, something to that effect. Because it seems that, though it's an incontestable fact that it was massively funny to people back then, just in terms of the success of it, it doesn't really seem that funny today. And I was trying to think, well, how about other things that were funny in that same time, do they seem funny today? And, uh, who knows?

Q: One thing I was hoping was, the possibility was like a longshot, but I was hoping that maybe, at least on occasion, that the true bathos of Martin and Lewis would be supplied by Dean.

A: Well, the only movie of the Martin-Lewis pictures where I saw that happening was *Three Ring Circus*, where Jerry actually seems to honestly look at him and say, "You're not nice anymore." And that's like the movie that was sort of the beginning of the end for them. 'Cause like the only song Dean gets to sing by himself all the way through he sings to animals — they don't even give him a dame.

Q: That was their poignant one?

A: Yeah.

Q: In the film that I saw this week, Jerry actually had a message, it was about things like friendship and tolerance...

A: And the message got stronger with each film as Jerry's, uh, basically his role in the team

Marlin and first wife Lucille, c. 1955 grew and grew.

Q: It was almost like he was there to flagellate himself so that Dean would, y'know, put Band-Aids on him.

A: Yeah.'

o

Q: Did you ever get a sense of how as a team they

could've endured as long as they did?

A: Well, I think one of the keys, the key to understanding that, was at one point towards the end, when Jerry talks about the love that exists between them and Dean says, "Talk about love all you want. When I look at you I just see a dollar sign." I think he just, they ^ were both making a lot of money.

Q: Did Jerry say to you how, uh, the line where he says, when he was fucking them all, in the early days in Hollywood, he thought maybe they wanted to burp him?

A: That was, yeah. That was pretty cute, I thought. And I think like part of what worked between them was, I mean here's just this total mass of neuroses, and on the other end of the spectrum, uh, somebody who neither knew

Dean's ex-wife says he was completely content in doing absolutely nothing. Just sitting watching westerns.

nor cared nor had any need to know what neuroses were.

Q: Yeah. But you think Dean actually has had, in the course of his life, moments of peace?

A: I would say more than most people. From what I understand now, his ex-wife says he's completely content in doing absolutely nothing. Just sitting watching westerns. That's more than most human beings can say at most times in their life.

Q: In the last chapter, what is the western that you have him watching?

A: I sort of made that up. That was my own western. The western of my dreams.

Q: That's nice. It was sort of like an alternate *Duel in the Sun*.

A: I dunno, I mean there must've been hundreds I saw. You're the one who once said you like westerns 'cause they're all archetypes. So I guess that's the way they come back to me — as archetypes.

Q: I like the way you have each one of these lesser celebrities who worked in the films with him, every one of these people you talked to, they all have comments about Dean and at the same

time let you know who — they gave you their calling card. Like Ruta Ixe...

A: Yeah, Ruta Lee.

Q She has this line that, uh, "Dean floated like wonderful shit on water*" — what a line.

A: A line I had not heard before.

Q: Wonderful shit.

A: Coming from Ruta Lee.

Q: How many of those people you talked to did, I mean did you leave any of them out?

A: It was more a case of leaving much out that many of them said. I found that very few of them could like cut — I think there's something endemic about being a so-called movie star for so many years that every thought and word, every thought they have and word they say, is almost like scripted by some force within.

Q: Yeah. Whereas Dean, like Irene even made these comments, in terms of the psychology of acting, once he's doing the movies without Jerry, she just thought that his whole take on the preparation, how to do it and then doing it, was exactly what, y'know, acting classes try to get you to do. And I'm sure he didn't take any of those classes.

A: No. One thing that struck me as I spoke to more and more directors and actors, people that have worked with him, was that they were all, to one degree or another, in awe of him, y'know? I mean you get to the point where what's his name, uh, Daniel Mann, saying in many ways he was better to work with than Marlon Brando. That he not only knew his own lines but everyone else's. It was almost as if he could just catch this stuff and spit it out. And I think at one point in the '60s he just decided for some reason to stop, that none of it meant

anything, and everything he did after that was just travesty — sinking further and further into sleaze. Which in a way is more noble than just sinking further and further into some pretentious search for meaning or...

Q: I like when you mention that line in Some Came Running where, uh, "She's just a pig." / just saw that a few weeks ago and I thought: what a delivery!

A: Yeah. He's the best thing in the movie. He does that so beautifully. "Even she knows she's a pig" — or something like that. But he docs rings around a lot of the people he was with.

Q: Did Dean make any, were any of the later movies gore films?

A: Gore?

Q Movies with substantial amounts of violence? A: No. He stopped basically in '75, unless you consider the Cannonball Run movies...

Q: Did you see those?

A: Yeah, I saw them all. I saw them all. The one I liked the best, I mean most people go for the ones with the so-called, his great acting moments, like The Young I Jons, Rio Bravo, Toys in the Attic, uh. Career, but I like Kiss Me, Stupid, w here he plays a character called Dino. He plays himself, and it's an immersion in total sleaze. It's like the only movie to be banned by the Catholic lxrgion of Decency other than Baby Doll. It's very funny, it holds up, Ray Walston was good.

Q: So which is your favorite of the Matt Helm movies?

A: I guess the first one. But the third one is a favorite in a way, it was almost like, y'know, honoring the spirit of Edward D. Wood, Jr. Like Dean insisted, he didn't wanna go to the Riviera to do the Riviera scenes, so they had to build a fake Riviera for him on the set, and the special effects were on the level of large sparklers. They just, it's just total junk that made money. Sometimes I got the impression they wanted to just see how- much of this stuff will people cat, how much will people swallow, one way or the other.

Q Speaking of Edward D. Wood, this Wood book came out a few months ago, and then your book, and it's like both books, they're the first two books I've read about Hollywood that're worth a damn, and they're both written by New Yorkers.

A: Well, I don't know if that means anything, but in my research for this I was reading a lot of stuff. One of them, this book, w as pretty interesting, called An Empire of Their Own, it's about Jews in Hollywood — but they don't

yet had the world to do with it, y'know what I mean? I really think Dean Martin was and is the reflection of some great eternal, uh, principle as much as Elvis was.

Q: And after reading this, I would say more than Elvis.

A: Yeah, but most people would think, well, Elvis is much more famous — especially now that he's dead. I mean he was basically forgotten until he died.

Q Elvis was a guy who had hits early on, and with Dean it took a while.

A: Right. But I also think they both descended

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was an cl is the reflection of Some great etemaf, uh, principle as much as Oku was.

into the heart of schmaltz, forget about the heart of darkness, the heart of sleaze. Dean was much more of a pioneer in terms of sleaze, he did "Gentle on My Mind" before Elvis did. Plus Elvis idolized Dean, so there was a lot of mystery there — like who do the idols idolize?

Q: I like when you have Dean versus Hemingway — who will win ?

A: Oh, the beer ad.

Q Well, not just the beer ad...

A: Same TV night. For Whom the Fell Tolls and The Dean Martin Show, yeah. Sec, to me that says a lot right there. 'Cause by then

Hemingway had become just a bundle of pomposities and self-pretensions. Art with a capital A.

Q What'd you call him, made-for-TV?

A: I think he really was, he became, he was the first, a madc-for-TV character, a made-for TV writer.

Q: The line I think you have is aNow that Dean has beat him in both beer ads and TV, all that is left is to limp to the grave. "

A: "A slow, sad march to the grave." And it's true, he never wrote another book after that. And it was also indicative too, uh, that Hemingway did an ale advertisement,

where Dino, like he must've had many people offering him money to endorse products, and what did he pick? Rhcingold, the cheapest beer in New York.

Q I was wondering, uh, where you talk about Dean's father's barber shop and you mention all the brands of, is that like generic, or is it based on some evidence that these were the actual brands and flavors he used?

A: There was a local barber's journal, and they seemed to be the ones going big in Ohio in those years.

Q Tou actually found that?

A: In the New York Public Library.

Q There were a couple items, one was called Baldpate...

A: Baldpate, yeah, and the anti-mange, that's the one I like.

Q. Herpicide.

A: Yeah. Great stuff. And one reason I thought the book was never gonna get finished, I thought I would end up, like if I wanted to mention what was on the barber shelf, I actually studied diagrams of parts of a razor that was used back then. So it wasn't all just talking to Ray Walston.

Q Also, I don't mean to scold you, but you fail to mention, of all the big cheeses in the Ohio-Pennsylvania-West Virginia area who were

from Abruzzi, uh, how about Bruno Sammartino?

A: Didn't know he was from there.

Q: Well, he was from Pittsburgh, and he may or may not truly have been from Abruzzi, but that's how they used to announce it: "From Abruzzi, Italy..."

A: Your memory is better than mine.

Q: But you do mention Dodo Marmarosa, which is great.

A: From that area.

Q: A swell fact in the book: Dean 'sfirst child bom nine months after the wedding night.

A: Yeah. What was interesting is like when I first was faced with this immense task of figuring out who this character Dean Martin was, I went to the town of his birth and finally managed to dig out his birth certificate, and there was no name on it, it was blank — the man with no name. There was no name added to his birth certificate until he applied for a passport in 1950.

Q. It was like "male Crocetti"?

A: It just said "name of child," it was blank.

Q I remember the first time that you mentioned Dean in a kind of a, like a rock-historical context or whatever — the importance of being Dean — we were in some bar near, uh, was it the Angry Squire? Somewhere near 23rd Street?

A: There iwwsuch a place, yeah.

Q: It was about '73 or '74, and we saw this, there was a poster for, Columbia University or somen'here, "The Meeting of the Musics, " they had a jazz piano guy, a sitar player, a classical violinist, y'know, rock guitarist, and you said, "What about Dean Martin?"

A: Well, in a way I still believe that, man, how many, 20 years later and I still believe it, I mean I really just — I had to come up with a nonfiction subject to write a b<="" p="" style="box-sizing: border-box;">

Q: Teahl I believe that after reading it, but knowing you and your fondness for Dean all these years, and sharing that fondness to some extent, I certainly would never wince at the notion of anybody doing a bio of Dean.

A: If you Ux)k at, y'know, why has Elvis been raised to the level of the gtxis so much, it's for something that has nothing to do with music, right, or these movies, which were basically, when Martin and Lewis stopped, Hal Wallis just took Elvis and made the same dumb movies. I mean all that stuff that Elvis recorded in the '60s, the '70s, "Do the Clam," how much of it was, I mean Elvis was bigger than the sum of what he did, and I think the same is true of Dean.

(A- Elvis never made a good movie, right? Maybe in the beginning there are a few that are marginally interesting just because he's in them, but really none of 'em you could call even half-decent films. Dean was making better movies than Elvis for years and years, right?

A: Well, I think what was interesting if you watch Dean's movie career, there's a point where he wants to do it better than anybody else just to show he can, and then after that he's back to "Okay, fuck everything, I did it," that was it.

Q: I don't think I ever saw Ten Thousand Bedrooms. Is that bad?

A: It's very bad. That was almost the end of Dean Martin — as a person that could make a living.

Q: 'Cause I remember feeling sorry for him after he broke up with Jerry, and after seeing the first couple Jerry movies without Dean and they were a piece of shit too, but it seemed as if Jerry was still, still had some, uh, cachet...

A: Well, he did. His first solo movie. The Delicate Delinquent, was a big success.

Q And I remember feeling, like buying Dean's singles, "Return to Me" and "Volare" and stuff like that, and feeling, y'know, Dean deserves, uh, at least my purchase of these singles. But I did like that stuff, I mean as far as non-rock singles went in those days, and Dean's records were better than Jerry's movies, and Jerry had nothing but the movies.

A: Yeah, I, it was interesting, talking about buying Dean's records at the time, I did that show Fresh Air with Terri Gross, who's like always, it was real nice to be on her show, and I forget which, uh, she played some Dean record from the late '50s, and she asked me what I thought of it. I said, "Well, what'd you think of it the first time you heard it?" And she said she hated it because it was, it seemed to betray the cause of rock and roll. And I tried to say, "No, what it did was open up possibilities that are darker and profounder," y'know?

Q: Yeah. I mean I didn't think it was, not at the time, but the fact that I bought 'em — I didn't buy Mantovani records, I bought mostly rock and roll — and I found it, on whatever level, at least as acceptable, uh, more acceptable than Perry Como, at least as acceptable as those Elvis ballads like "I Love Me Tender," "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," it was no worse than that. And I don't think I ever bought a Sinatra single.

A: I know I never did.

Q: Does Sinatra still try to be with Dean?

A: At this point I don't know. It would be dishonest for me to say if anybody is trying to get to Dean these days, but Sinatra, as far as I know, is maintaining this schedule of nonstop performing, uh, London, I-as Vegas. I don't know what drives him, what's, at this

point where he can no longer — he can neither sing nor hear himself, his hearing is shit. So it's like what is he doing? You would think that power, fame, glory, and wealth could save you from having to have a hair weave, right?

Q: While meanwhile Dean...

A: Where IX*an, y'know, is basically out of, he's dropped out of everything. He'll never do anything again, I firmly believe that. He's one of the few greats that stopped ahead of death. It's hard to think of people who have stopped of their own free will before death took them.

Q: He doesn 't play golf anymore?

A: No, he stopped.

Q: It's nice the way you slip in the line, on the golf course, where he talks about, uh, where he wakes up every morning and has a massive bowel movement.

A: Yeah. I think that's one of the great philosophical fragments. In 2000 years they'll find it, it'll be next to Heraclitus or some, Parmenides — "the massive bowel movement." In a way, it's not that bad a definition of peace and happiness.

Q: Rut my favorite line, lemme find it...page 171: ulhe gyttecopia of starlet slutdom was his to savor at will *

A: The critic of the New York Daily News, a high literary establishment, found that line very offensive. I like I think in ever)' review that's even loved the book, they're somehow afraid that the language or the sensibilities w ill offend others. Which I figure, I mean how do you w rite about dark sensibilities without being dark?

Q: Or how do you write about anything without using your own p.o.v.?

A: There's like a lot of concern about language lately, it seems to be getting almost, y'know, prim and proper. Like all the fuss about "Cop Killer," I can't figure — you think it's 50-50? The fucks or the cops?

Q I think it's simply the cops. Because if they really paid attention to the record, there's a song about killing your mother on there. "Mama's Gonna Die Tonight. " Which would seem to be, that would be the one...

A: It reminds me of "Ghost Busters." "Whudda you wanna be w'hen you grow up?...Cop killer!" But the thing is, like to me rock and roll, one way or another, was always supposed to be incendiary, and at least this is, whether it's good or bad, y'know? Rock and roll was meant to start fucking trouble, and they're doing it, which is a lot more than Sting is doing. It's good to see that there's somebody out there who's still, not that these people are difficult to shock, but at least throw them something incendiary. To me it's like, in an ideal world, Dean would be on that record. He didn't wanna play a cop, that's what broke Martin-Lewis up — he didn't wanna play the cop in The Delicate Delinquent. He saw the script, he said, "A cop? I won't play a cop." I mean if there was something Dean was gonna come out for, out of hiding, y'know, it could be to add his vocals.

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Best Of

Not everything stinks about the World Wrestling Federation

To say it's fake is to miss the point, you pencil-neck geek.

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[May 30, 1985](#)

Sports



Piper kicks Hogan. Note former's...intensity.

There is no more a problem of truth in wrestling than in the theatre.

— Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

I threw the paper into the corner and turned on the TV set. After the society page dog vomit even the wrestlers looked good.

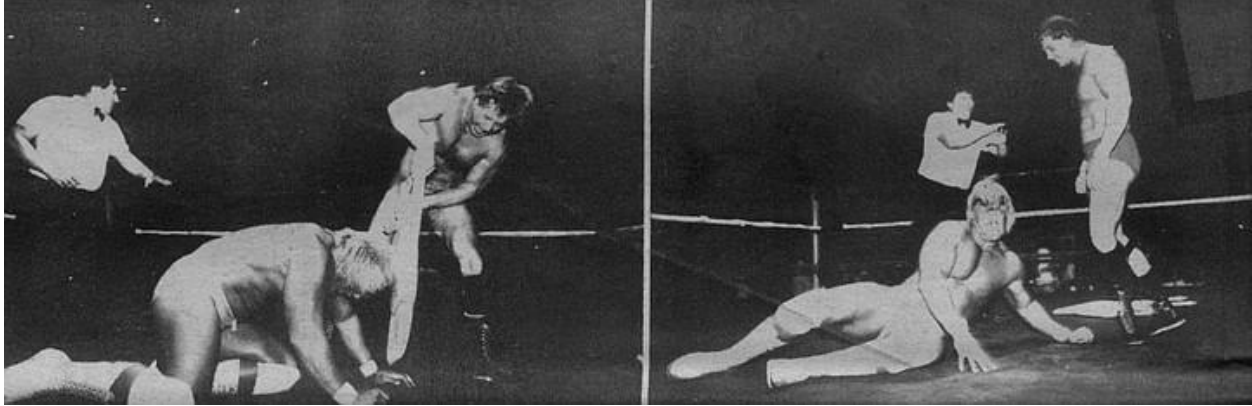
— Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*

What is portrayed by wrestling is therefore an ideal understanding of things; it is the euphoria of men raised for a while above the constitutive ambiguity of everyday situations and placed before the panoramic view of a univocal Nature, in which signs at last correspond to causes, without obstacle, without evasion, without contradiction.

— Barthes, *ditto*

I can beat anyone up. And I can walk and talk too.

— Hulk Hogan



Okay, get out your notebooks. This here is lecture time. Wrestling Goes Mainstream. An outcome that is vile, it's loathsome, it may even cause cancer — don't laugh, this is *serious*. Somebody help me wheel out the blackboard . . . where the hell's my chalk? Okay, pens and pencils ready: I HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT.

1. By plugging right smack into the Master Program, wrestling has gone from being something *uniquely fake*, *archetypally fake*, *paradigmatically fake for real*, to something nonironically fake per se, standardly fake like Everything is fake: movies, TV, "real" sports, fashion trends, heart transplants, national elections.
2. An all-too-willing conspirator in the Ruse Writ Large, it is no longer the needle-threading, universe-belching master of its own persona, ceding (in all ways crucial, for a mess of potage) the Grand Generatrix of its own awesome face to the cloning yuck — for shame! for shame! — of *demographics*.
3. Where once upon a not so distant past wrestling proudly mucked and traded in all that was Low — as in geeks, carnies and bathos — its current sense of market is defined wholly and simply by that lowest of common Denoms: children, hipsters and morons (principally Caucasian).
4. Formerly (same time frame) the incarnation of Bombast/Pure/No Limit, it has reeled in its oompah, chiseled its swagger, to coalesce with the twin towers of topical cowpoo strut, Get! Down! and U!S!A!
5. Not in the wrestling lifetime of any of us under 50 have even the *most* impressive of good guys exhibited the consistently commanding Presence, or been ultimately as Interesting, as your average bad guy, 50th percentile and up. And while roleplay flexibility, including the option of 180° reversals on a dime, has always been a vital part of the trip, bad-to-good transitions have become an all-too-prevalent fact of life, as witnessed by the surrender-of-self of far too many Significant Malevolents in the last couple annums: Hulk Hogan, Sgt. Slaughter, Superfly Snuka and — saddest of all — Lou Albano. (Reagan Era culture death at its most chilling.)

6. With its own entertainment I.D. no longer that of the bad guy — or even a bad guy — wrestling hooks up with *the* perennial bastion of choreographed insincerity (a.k.a. telegraphed sincerity), itself once Quite Bad but recently born again Good (“We Are the World”; Cyndi Lauper for Cystic Fibrosis), the festering megacorpse of mainstream rock. Underlining even more than the preeminence of Product over Art, this alliance made in Suburban Hell officially certifies our current megadistance from a world in which, massively, minutely or otherwise, art (or daring) ever really, truly *functioned*.
7. A TV staple since virtually the medium’s birthing, wrestling for 35 years had the firmness of mission to ignore the insidious beseechings of any and all cathode Style Sheets, serving up the rawest and (possibly) most steadfastly life-affirming of broadcast gestalts: seamed and seamy—but such (ah!) is Life. Today, TV-ized to the gills and snout, it is seamless, sanitized, canned-featured, digitally animated, color-commentated, slo-mo’ed and SLICK — as suffocatingly awful as *Wide World of Sports* (or the bloody Super Bowl).
8. With the WWF running, basically, the whole entire show, and the NWA, AWA, etc. reduced *collectively* to less than a sliver of the pie, wrestling’s once mighty Pluralism — its infrastructural one-up on all-American athleto-monistic hooey — has been sent the way of the horse, the buggy, the Bill of Rights.
9. More a geo-conceptual problem than an econo-monopolistic one, today’s centralized national setup all but banishes Geographic Mystery from the stew. To wit (for example), where in New York ‘73 it was announced that Stan “The Man” Stasiak had wrestled from Pedro Morales the then-WWIPF championship *off camera* in Philadelphia, and it was debated by bemused cognoscenti whether in fact Philadelphia *existed* (i.e. as a WWWF outpost), it would be downright *fruitless* to any longer doubt our Phillies, your Boises, Buzzard Creeks — the WWF blankets us all. To wit number two, “Parts Unknown,” the hearth and home of Mr. Wrestling II, The Spoiler, Spot Moondog et al, is (as any kid up on the “new math” will tell you) finally *inside* the bubble!
10. As the breakdown/ abandonment of regional promotion becomes more or less complete, local *non*-televised wrestling cards, once the quasi-lifeblood of the whole dang whatsis, tend to suffer most (proportionally) of all, especially with the goddam Hulk so unassailably entrenched as the Big Cheese-Designate and coast-to-coast hogger of hype. The Hulkster and his immediate foes can only fight so many nights a year, see, and with no local *first* units to draw from — such folk having either been absorbed nationally, shipped to jurisdictions unknown or locked out to rot — towns large and small are too often stuck with national second units that essentially *stink*, so great is the disparity of urgency (at Choreography Central) between Hulk-level horseshit and everything else. And without loser-leaves-town matches to occasionally fall back on (as there’s no longer a “town” to leave)...gosh
11. Okay. Here’s one for laughs. Time was muscles, make that muscles *without* accompanying fat, were the exclusive domain of “narcissists,” sissyboys — in any event, *some* kind of weirdos — and bullies. Muscle creeps were

hideous monsters, good guys never had them, certainly not the swollen fibrous crap you'd see in muscle mags, and even *strong* good guys, those to whom strength was their *thing*, had about as much flab sticking out their trunks as your average beer slob. * Nor was there ever the faintest need for flabless abs, pecs or delts to even *alternately* serve as any sort of mat-tempered Fitness Metaphor, for what was fitness but the sick joke of joggers? Okay, fine, great, amazing: a wrestling iconographically fair to the natural slob in Everyman. So what happens but Fitness Chic erupts like a case of the hives, inshape Olympic dipshits, *hundreds* of 'em, grab the national scrotum without subtlety or mercy, Schwarzenegger makes a couple (*Only exceptions: those rare bozos whose not-half-bad overall physiques were really no more than corny general echoes of acceptably overdeveloped anatomical trademarks — Antonino Rocca and his "educated" bare *feet*; Pepper Gomez and his stomach that could withstand Killer Kowalski's claw hold; etc.) pics with and without his shirt — so what's wrestling go do but ruthlessly pander-to-trend. Possibly the sickest hallmark of the New Wrestling is rippling goddam fibers across the board: from bad guys as always (Paul Orndorff, Brutus Beefcake) to principal good guys (Hogan, Snuka) to peripheral stiffes (Ricky Steamboat) to even — wouldja believe it? — *announcers* (Jesse "The Body" Ventura). Add to this all those hokey ersatz training tapes ("... pumping iron with Dick Wazoo in his Gym") and what we're faced with is Slob Disenfranchisement of the most nefarious ilk. Pshaw!

12. By shilling for itself on priorly occupied turf (Letterman, *Saturday Night Live*, the sports sections of major metropolitan dailies), wrestling actually finds itself in a position to catalytically undermine an incredibly stupid and docile nation's belief structure re Everything, to effect the removal of the Master Program ring from a people's collective nose as it were. A NOUS LA LIBERTE – wrestling style!! But such is far, *far* from its bag of intentions — and it sure don't want snot on its hands.

Let's be fair. Not *everything* stinks about today's wrestling, not even that practiced by the essentially repugnant World Wrestling Federation, formerly the World Wide Wrestling Federation, which according to a recent *Village Voice* cover story has penetration rights to a whopping 87 per cent of U.S. TV homes — and climbing — and is so Johnny-on-the-nosering it even puts out its own wrestling *mag*, kind of the equivalent of a hit sitcom marketing its own *TV Guide*; Freddie Blassie (for instance) does not stink at all. In fact he is coming up roses.

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During the hype hoedown which preceded MTV's "Rock & Wrestling Connection" whizoff between Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan, for inst, while everyone from Little Richard to Gloria Steinem was delivering cheesy well-rehearsed cliché in support (mostly) of Ms. Lauper's cultural sugardad Hogan, Classy Fred, nonpartisan to a fault, went straight for the corporate jugular, bellowing a motherfucking *gem* of from-the-

hip truth & concision: "WHAT GOOD IS MTV???!!! THEY NEVER PLAY 'STARDUST' OR THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM!!!! " Indeed, indeed, and howzabout a couple months back when, prodded to explain how as a loyal American he could give succor to "Communists and Iranians," namely his tagteam charges Nikolai Volkoff and the Iron Sheik, this top-five all-time *master* interviewee (the others being the *pre*-sold-out Lou Albano, the late Grand Wizard, and the long-gone John Tolos and Killer Kowalski) exclaimed simply, "I support WINNERS!!!!" – inspirational or what? (Up there, in the author's opinion, with Ron Delhims' voice-in-the-wilderness characterization of Jimmy Carter's '80 Olympic boycott, which he was one of only something like maybe two-three members of Congress to refuse to endorse, as "hysterical" — Great Moments in Keeping the Faith.)



Then there's master interviewer Roddy Piper, he of WWF insert *Piper's Pit*, one talkshow host who really knows How. Former house villain at (L. A.'s own) Olympic Auditorium, a likable hack whose principal shtick never amounted to much more than aggressive cowardice, Roddy has finally graduated to a task that suits him, beating out-of-ring good guys (qua naive, unsuspecting talkshow guests) with chairs, smashing bananas in their face. "Sympathy," he's been quoted as saying, "comes after stupidity and suicide in the dictionary." Talkshow hostility carried to its logical, inevitable conclusion (and the only leap in either tenor or scale — from Old Wrestling to New, from local dungeon to national slick — which seems to have been worth the effort, the gamble, whatever the hey).

Actually, though, to be *really* fair, Vince McMahon's macro-talkshow *TNT*, formerly *Tuesday Night Titans*, has also had its moments, including probably *the* big world-is-watching (hundreds of thousands? over USA Cable) moment of 'em all: the Butcher Vachon wedding. While the WWF kingpin's sense of Manifest Bombast has too often of late been that of a golfing banker or nonironic (barely even cynical) pesticide lobbyist, those rare occasions when he's let the empire's hair down, and trusted the thing to communal autopilot, have been purt near transcendent. The Wedding: collaborative improv/sequential pluralism on a par with some of your better Battle Royales, or Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* (for instance).

And Kamala, the three-hundred-some-odd-pound Ugandan Giant, he of few teeth and fewer traditional holds, a true innovator, he just kind of knocks 'em over, falls on 'em and eventually gets up, too pure for the WWF so now he's out in the boonies of something called the Mid-South — anyway *he's* okay.

And King Kong Bundy, 458 lbs. of monster metaphor/mixed (radiation-sick colossus meets shaved-head vampire meets world's largest amoeba meets lab animal that fucks-your-mom), wrestling's ultimate genetic accident (in the hands, no less, of the mad, post-scientific WWF) and master of the 5-count pin (3 is for simps, wimps and earlier phases of the beast): as okay as it gets.

And someone I've never actually seen wrestle, just his photo in the "Mat Mania!" issue of *Sports Illustrated*, this guy (?) with stupid hair and face paint called the Missing Link, no idea where he wrestles but I'd *bet* he's alright. I would bet ten bucks.

Otherwise — suddenly I'm feeling generous, I don't know why, but let's give some points to Big John Studd, Ken Patera and Bobby Heenan for clipping Andre the Giant's healthy head o' sheep hair — otherwise, and I've been watching this junk since 1956 (so I know), otherwise *nada*, 's an average lame era at best, the EMPEROR'S NEW YUPPIE THREADS — and I'm being fair. I am.

I've been watching the shit since 1956, actually earlier; have *followed* it since around '56 — more or less continuously. Some multi-year gaps here & there, sure, but also some great big hunks of uninterrupted focus, bigger than for 2/3 the things in my life. I've been to it live at least 200 times in various cities, or let's say 175–180. I've seen 8 or 9 battle royals. Wrestling was the first sport (by any definition) that *meant* anything to me, like I'd catch the world series or a bowl game most every year but so what. Discovered and learned the whole sporting pot pourri in sequence to it, first bought *The Ring* 'cause they had maybe 2–3 pages of wrestling in back, eventually read the boxing up front and started watching, hadda then buy *Sports Illustrated* and *Sport* to widen my boxing horizon, in the process managing to additionally notice (in sequence) football, hockey, basketball, baseball, etc. [*Where the author is "coming from."*]

Around '53 or '54 I remember my grandfather watching on a tiny black & white, sweat dripping, seegar jutting/jerking in his twisted mouth. In turn-of-the-20th Russia he himself had wrestled, or so he claimed, taking on smalltown bullies (Greco-Roman style) for a bottle of vodka. As half a century later wrestling could not help *remaining* a matter of honor, this almost-an-anarchist nobody's-fool would yell at the screen, "Use your hammerlock!" — affairs of honor can scarcely be faked.

[*Germplasmic source of a cultural postulate.*]

Independent of gramps I hooked into the whatsis somewhere during my first semester of junior high — a couple months after hooking into rock & roll fifteen years before it was pan-corporate slime by catching Elvis on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

Krazy music (from then on) I could always catch — the home radio'd all but been abandoned in the wake of TV — but krazy ringside hi-jinx I had to (appropriately) fight for. All they had on in New York back then was Thursday night wrestling from D.C., promoted, interestingly enough, by McMahon's old man Vince Sr., which since it shared the slot of bran'new goddam *Playhouse 90* meant I hadda fight the folks to even catch five minutes. (A compromise was eventually reached: alternating weeks. Which meant, in one typical stretch, them missing part one of the Playhouse 90 "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and me missing Mark Lewin & Don Curtis losing the U.S. Tag Team Championship to the Graham Brothers, Eddie & Dr. Jerry, while they lucked into catching part two.) By the time I was in the 9th grade I was so gaga for wrestlin' I even wormed my way into a car with ten or eleven relatives I couldn't stand 'cause they were headed down D.C. for Easter where they had this 6-man whoosis they weren't gonna televise—Lewin, Curtis and 601-lb. Haystacks Calhoun vs. the

Grahams and Johnny Valentine — and Jesus was it a *lulu*. In the second fall the Grahams refused Valentine's tag, he wasn't their brother so they let him get his ass beat. He got pinned and some stretcher guys carried him out but then midway through the third fall he came running back out with a bandage around his head swinging this long fucking pipe at all five of the rest of 'em, eventually *pinning* Haystacks (kayoed by a chair) while the others were busy swinging stuff at each other, the only time (though I could be wrong) the big fatso was actually counted out, shoulders to the mat 1-2-3 — and I was there. And I was there, 1974, seventh row ringside, Madison Square Garden, when Freddie Blassie actually punched Bruno Sammartino *in the balls* — without (hey hey?) a script?— and I'm such a sap I've even gone to, and sat through, midgets in Texas. [*Evidence of abiding affection.*]

And I've seen Blassie, '71 at the Olympic Aud., biting John Tolos's head for must've been 10-15 minutes of *just biting* — nothing else! — until he just kind of relinquished his grip and the bloody bit-up Tolos fell over flat 'n' inert like so much dead red meat, ONLY TO COME BACK STRONG AND COP THE THIRD AND DECIDING FALL — so I know comebacks. And this current whatever it is Wrestling Writ Large is supposed to be undergoing is not (not) a comeback. 'Cause, writ large, it's never been "away." Or particularly "down." I mean yeah, some regional promotions *had* dried up 'n' out from their own flaming ineptitude (the Olympic's LeBells for inst), and the mass consumption of Hulkamania t-shirts does represent *some* kind of "advance," but truly, writ Large, with or without the glitz, the thing has been superpopular for *decades*. Or some such duration.

Like I've got this page clipped from a mid-'73 *Wrestling News*. It says: "Professional Wrestling Is Our Number One Sport! — we have statistics to back this up!" And the stats have Pro Wrestling at 35,000,000, ahead of College Football at 33,000,000, Major League Baseball at 30,000,000, College Basketball at 25,000,000 and so on, down to Pro Boxing at a crummy 5,000,000. This is "1972 U.S. Sports Attendance" they're giving, not as profit-ledger significant as paid attendance maybe — and certainly no bottom-line plurality without concurrent sales of caps, headbands, bumper stickers and bobbing-head dolls — but significant nonetheless. "Amazing But True!" exclaims author Norman H. Kietzer but I'm neither amazed nor incredulous; I wasn't then and I am not now.

'Cause what's the 35 million ultimately represent? Let's say you've got a hardcore of 10 million wrestling fans, or had one in '72, a low estimate either way but all you need to pack in 35 is each of 'em hauls ass and goes live 3.5 times a year — a reasonable

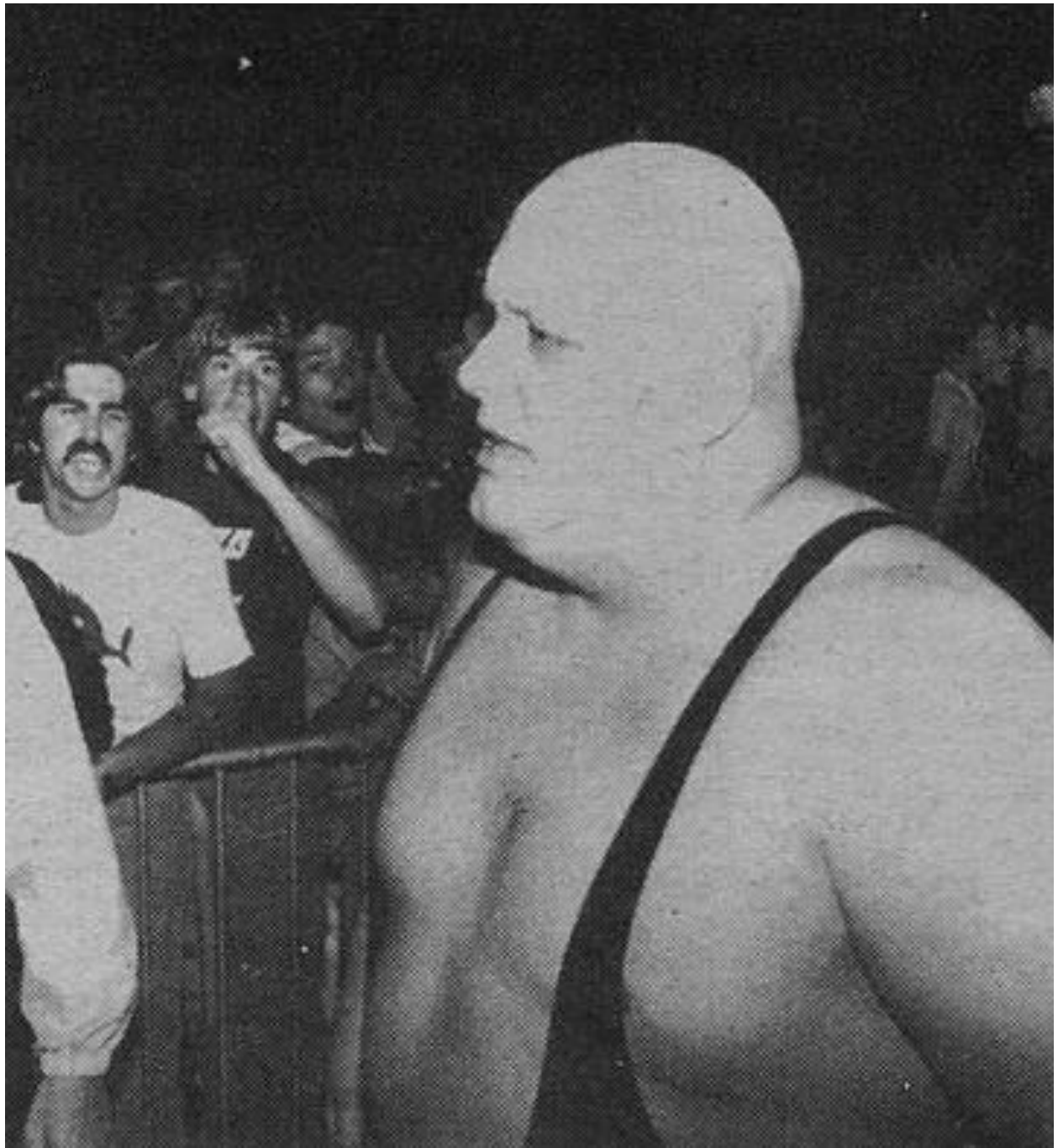
assumption. I mean even marginal fans go *at least* once per average year (to a battle royal, for instance), more than has gotta be the case for baseball, football, tennis or whatever. Factor in all the *occasionally* gung-ho azzholes like myself (I went, for inst, to every Island Garden care.in West Hempstead, N.Y., from '57 fo '59, every Madison Sq. Garden show from '72 to '75, every *weekly* Olympic bash from late '75 to early '77, and though I currently watch maybe 80 football games a year I've attended but one since '78) and 3.5/per is a no-sweat cinch — and we're not even talkin' those hundreds of thousands of weird fucks who're so beyond cycles of interest they (and their families) go every every time. And you want availability of product? These guys still wrassle 300 times a year; draw a circle around *any* major burg and there's gotta be (even *post-dryout*) 5-10 shows a month within 100 miles; probably more. Multiply dah dah dum by dah dah dee . . . you get the picture. '72, '85, whatever: demonstrably superpopular.

All that's going on is Vince Jr. performing insidious thus-&-such with this legitimate mass popularity as its base, structurally redistributing the remaining world's access to its variables & whatnot 'til he gets to have it All and Then Some — conspicuously. VHF, UHF, cable, closed circuit. Ads for jeans and Valvoline. Headbands, sweatbands and posters that fit *exactly* on the bedroom doors of suburban New Age 12-year-olds. Aesthetically coequal competitors — many of whom his dad even played quasi-friendly ball with — cringing, sighing, crying in his New Age megacapitalist wake. Which, apropos of comebacks, is akin to Columbia Records buying out WEA, MCA and Polygram (or undermining their promotion, distribution, etc. ' they're down 'round the scale of India Navigation and SST), prodding Springsteen, Michael Jackson and whoever-the-fuck to record five albums/each a year and listing them at \$22.50 (everything else, \$18.95). . . and hailing *that* as a glorious comeback for American Music.

THE FUTURE OF AN ILL 'LUSION — more of Same at least until winter. *Saturday Night's Main Event*, subbing monthly for *Saturday Night Live* reruns, spring/summer, NBC; a Hulk Hogan *cartoon* (isn't he one already?), Saturday mornings come fall, CBS.

But a backlash may be brewing. The entertainment-industrial complex is not, as a unit, all that firmly behind its new partner-inschlock's center stage aspirations. David Letterman seemed ten times as snotty with Mr. T the "wrestler," guest-promoing WrestleMania, as he'd conceivably have been — at his existentially *most* ill-tempered — with T the "actor," promoing some shitty movie or a new season of *A Team*. Even on *Saturday Night Live*, guest hosts T and Hogan

served as little more than token-trendy walkons, showing up in no skits except as themselves, even though Hogan in particular, in spite of all the bug-eyed grandiosity, is a *far* better comic actor than any current SNL regular. Like he well may be (from certain angles, in certain lights) an overinflated, hyperventilating Martin Mull doll, but he's still got it all over your Martin Shorts and Billy Crystals — therefore use him but *subdue* him.



And then, the topper so far, the belated foofaraw of Richard Belzer (rhymes with Meltzer) after Hogan, in the process of demonstrating a sleeper hold, dropped the fatuous comic, host of cable dogshit *Hot Properties*, on his head. Speaking by phone the following day over Stanley Siegel's *America Talks Back*, Belzer presumably stumped for All Entertainers when he said: "Our only weapons are our wit and our minds, and we never physically impose ourselves on others." Yeah, but didn't his ma ever teach him not to trust his person to monsters?

What soon may make for problems, however — Real Problems — is the glaring fact that *in* the ring, one-on-one with the biggest and baddest of *professional* opponents, the Hulkster is no less imposing. With the possible exception of King Kong Bundy, who's either being groomed as his longterm Rival Apparent or merely being readied for a round of patty cake with Andre the Giant, he really hasn't got *dick* to square off with. Even Piper, as delightful a fuckface as one could demand in a foe, is just too relatively puny — 231 lbs. to the Hulk's official 305 — to continue commanding Hulkoid credibility without the Orndorffs, Orttons, whoever's forever woven into the plot. And let's say, for argument sake, you take the search *outside* the cozy confines of the WWF to peruse, for a Hypothetical Contender of suitable dimension, the register of the nearest promotional rival, Verne Gagne and White Sox owner Eddie Einhorn's Pro Wrestling USA. Okay: WWF bailout Sgt. Slaughter, 310, physical enormity plus sado-military oompah — perfect. Only he's a good guy now, and will be as long as soldiers of the red/white/blue are regarded by schooltots as he-ros. He'd *never* pull a First Strike on the Hulker, and how else could the thinning blond Come Back in all his bug-eyed, calorie-scorching awesomeness? Okay: Ric Flair, Jerry Lawler. Baaad guys, fine — at least the last time I looked — vainglorious muhfuhs to the frickin' *gills* . . . but not much bigger than Piper. 243 and 234, respectively. So I dunno, even on imaginary drawing boards it's a Problem. Bigger Lies will hafta be concocted. (Or maybe I've watched too much boxing.)

Which is why I prefer wrestling INTERVIEWS: all voice boxes are anatomically equal. Or close enough.

PHONY OR FAKE? — John Stossel still can't know the half of it. Goes up to David "Doctor D" Schultz in the waning moments of an embarrassingly deadpan wrestling-is-fake segment on ABC's *20/20* and coyly solicits the 6-6, 270-lb. on-off switch (always locked in on): "I have to ask you the *conventional question* . . ." — as if the guy reads Derrida or subscribes to the *New Yorker* — "is wrestling fake?" For which,

not surprisingly, he gets whapped in one ear, then the other, after which he claims “loud buses” make his head ring; Babwa Walters commiserates. Poor John.

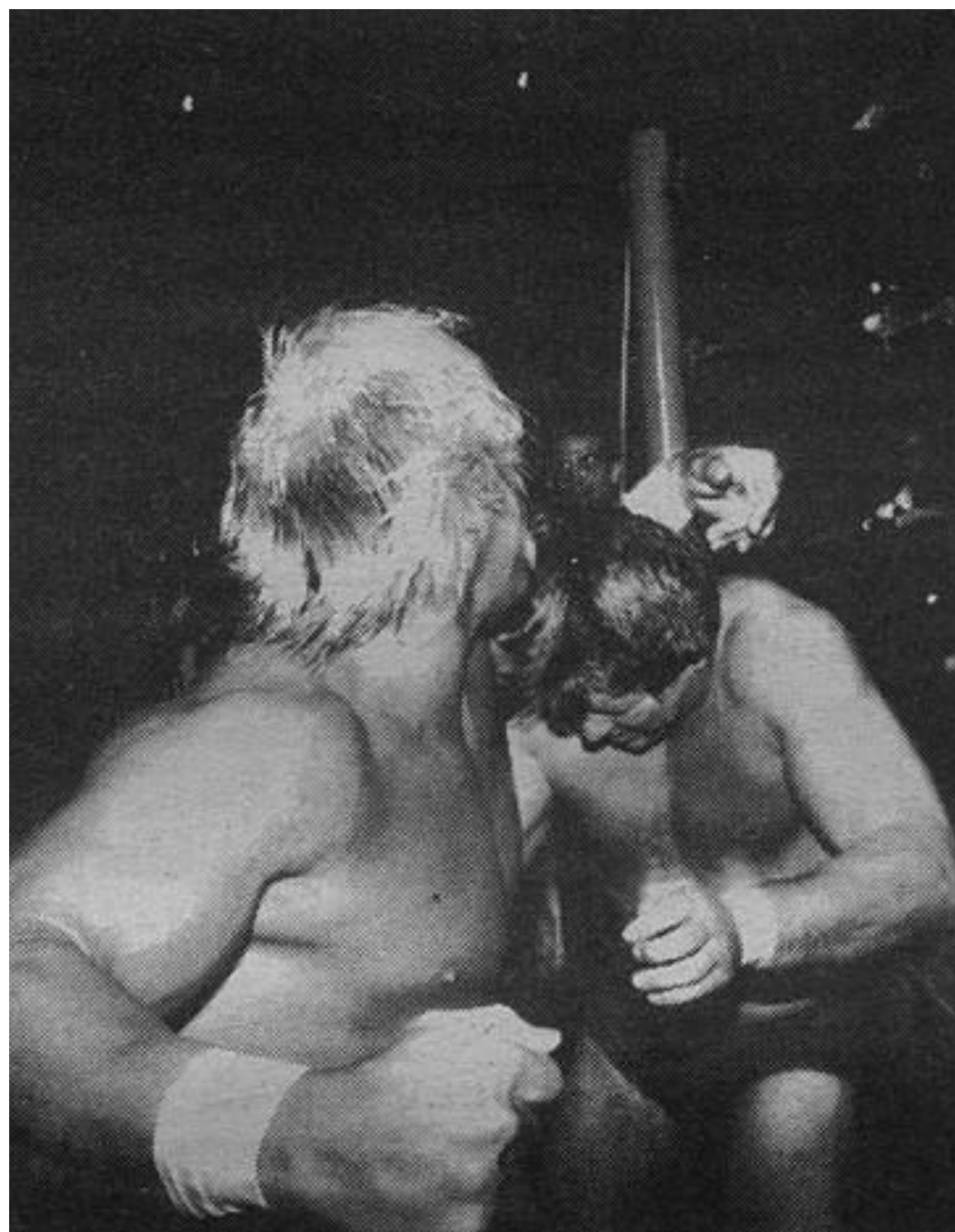
JUST IMAGINE, on the other hand, if he’d slithered up instead to some ABC windup stooge from *Dynasty* or *Matt Houston*, or some same-network movie of the week about teen pregnancy or white-collar alcohol abuse, and axed ‘em, right after they’d shot some typical maimer of the human spirit (on the income from which they would wine, dine and toot far, far better than the king & queen of Belgium), “Lemme just *hit you* with this one: How do you um uh *relate* to the possibility that you have, just now, willingly participated in the complete, utter, wanton and systematic falsification of Reality as even a cactus would understand the term?” I mean not every recipient of the query would punch the dork’s lights out (or even snarl menacingly), but automatons do not have their pride, and after this one even Babwa would not be around to commiserate.

How role-playing robots behave under sudden fire is hardly the issue, though. Nor is the “veracity” of newsman Stossel’s presentation (fixed! fixed!) before getting whapped. As umpteen-year wrestling partisan Bill Liebowitz puts it: “Why doesn’t he do an expose of Doug Henning? So it’s done with wires and mirrors! So he’s not really a sorcerer! I mean come on.

Come on, indeed; some targets are too fat even for a laugh. The nightly news, for instance — show me a more *malignant* forcible orchestration of metarealities. Wrestling’s 200 worst Reality crimes are benignly pale in comparison. But fat is fat, and I won’t touch it. What it *does* behoove me to touch, however, and get all testy about is Letterman’s treatment of T in sequence with the *rest* of that night’s show. Right after T they had this newcomey actress person, some raving ditz I have still not seen in her fucky-wucky feature with Madonna so who am I to comment, but she sure seemed like easy ditz-fodder for David to mock the living fluid out of two minutes after doing same to T, Rosanna Arquette. I mean maybe in fact she’s a veritable *bee’s knee* of the big wide silver screen — anything’s poss — although nothing like that ever stopped him from lickety splitting for obvious jocular jugulars, never stopped him before and here he had all these cues flying in his face and all he did was act POLITE, CHARMING and APOLOGETIC (for a joke he *rescinded*). Like maybe she was just his week’s quota of gals to be nice to, but it seemed purt near obvious, what with her and T juxtaposed like that, that when the chips were down, with personal squaresville “image” on the line, Letterman the Not-So-Nihilistic could always be counted upon to ally himself— on a dime — with one convenient strain of showbiz sham, one fly-by-night manufactured reality, over a slightly more topically disposable other. Contempo cinema over ringside pus indeed!

At which point T if he was any sort of *real* wrestler would've surged back onto the set & split massive hairs for the viewing world to see. Realer wrestler (and realer actor!) Andy Kaufman would've done it automatic.

ANDY KAUFMAN: the Rosebud in rassling's attic. Who, you may recall — apropos of talkshow hokum—once got himself a late-night “busted neck” (courtesy of real live *actual* wrestler Jerry Lawler) the so-called *authenticity* of which we may never truly know — 'cause now he's dead. Everybody's got a theory; mine stems from when Allan Arkush set me up with the guy while directing him in *Heart Beeps*. I had this treatment I'd done years before with my pal Nick for a blaxploitation wrestling pic called *Soul Stomper*, and Arkush thought Andy'd be interested. Would've been—maybe — only the thing (7 sketchy pages) didn't stress, quite to his satisfaction, didn't *underline* enough that wrestling was f-fixed. A structural purist, he wanted things right-on correct from the gitgo, nothing a neophyte could read as ambiguous. So my own initial read on his getting piledrived by Lawler was he'd either (a) misread the extent to which the other guy's “knowing that he knew the code” would make things functionally palsy-walsy (wrestling-as-*dealt* being to Andy the selfsame matter of Honor that wrestling as primal grope had been for my gramps), affable enough on a de facto co-insiders' plane for his brother-in-spirit not to betray him (a slight variation on Stossel/Belzer) or (b) he'd already opted to *become* wrestling.



When, in the last year or so of his life, he began appearing regularly as a wrestler on local Memphis TV, occasionally in the ring as a sap bad guy who could not do zilch to save his pipsqueak ass, but more importantly as a *great* interview (“You’re all rednecks! I’m from Beverly Hills!” — i.e., carpetbag archetype city), the half-guess of (a) became more and more a vanity of cranky Empiricism. With his neck-grudge against Lawler fully in context as an utterly Romantic rite of wrestling passage, and with King Kong Bundy’s present manager Jimmy Hart as his squeaky-intense “advisor,” Kaufman tossed off some all-time *wonders* of squared-circle shtick. Like I’ve seen this tape of what’s gotta be his *own* greatest public moment, something so amazing that Richard Foos at Rhino, who’s already got distribution on the great-enough (despite crummy sound) *My Breakfast with Blassie*, oughta waste no time in securing home-cassette (if not theatrical) rights to, a testament to Hope — and Glory! — which our Culture-deprived world of pain could surely use a dose of.

What happens is this. Kaufman, in regular boring street clothes and a silly, stupid rhinestoned crown, paces aimlessly outside the ring during a tagteam throwaway involving some Hart-managed local bozos when suddenly Lawler himself emerges from the wings to wantonly hurl “fire” in the face of our carpetbag anti-hero. He writhes on the ground. Hart’s boys leave the ring — and are instantly disqualified — to selflessly come to his assistance. He writhes some more, hands covering his face; (first rule of First Aid) they strategically restrain him. After much delay a stretcher arrives to bear him away. “Hospital reports” are flashed over subsequent matches. Finally at card’s end the hospital-treated Kaufman appears, burn marks (cum mutant-film radiation festers) here and there on his never-exactly-handsome mug, conventionally bound “scripts” in his tense-with-message mitts. “DeNiro . . . Pacino . . . Robert Redford” — he bitterly lets ‘em drop — “*all of them* wanted me in their movies” — gasp, pant — “but because of YOU, Lawler, I will never work in Hollywood again!! ” Followed by an obligatory “I’m gonna GET YOU!” and who knows, maybe he never did get to make another pitcher.

Anyway the *real* Rosebud in this monkey farm is did he or did he not already know he had cancer? Because clearly, absolutely, Wrestling was hardly just another warmup for him, another coldreading class, a craft-honing actperson workshop — or even a more radically advanced waiter gig at the Bagel Nosh. That sort of hooley might have had meaning for the Andy Kaufman of *Breakfast with Blassie*, a journeyman bloke (with a strong sense of irony) role-priming his licks as Stanislavskian setups for rants by the Great One. Taking the plunge, committing to Wrestling as IT, he *became* Blassie — or a screamingly brilliant facsimile. So what we need to know, vis-a-vis possible death-knowledge, is was this (by choice) his literal Final Stand?

Someone must know.

HOLD THE PRESSES –Orndorff too. Has just fired Bobby Heenan & become a good guy. Abandon all hope — the show is over.

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Best Of

Meltzer leaves L.A., tosses Ornette, Parker, Dolphy, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Lester Young, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor

Slayer planet

Author

Richard Meltzer

Publish Date

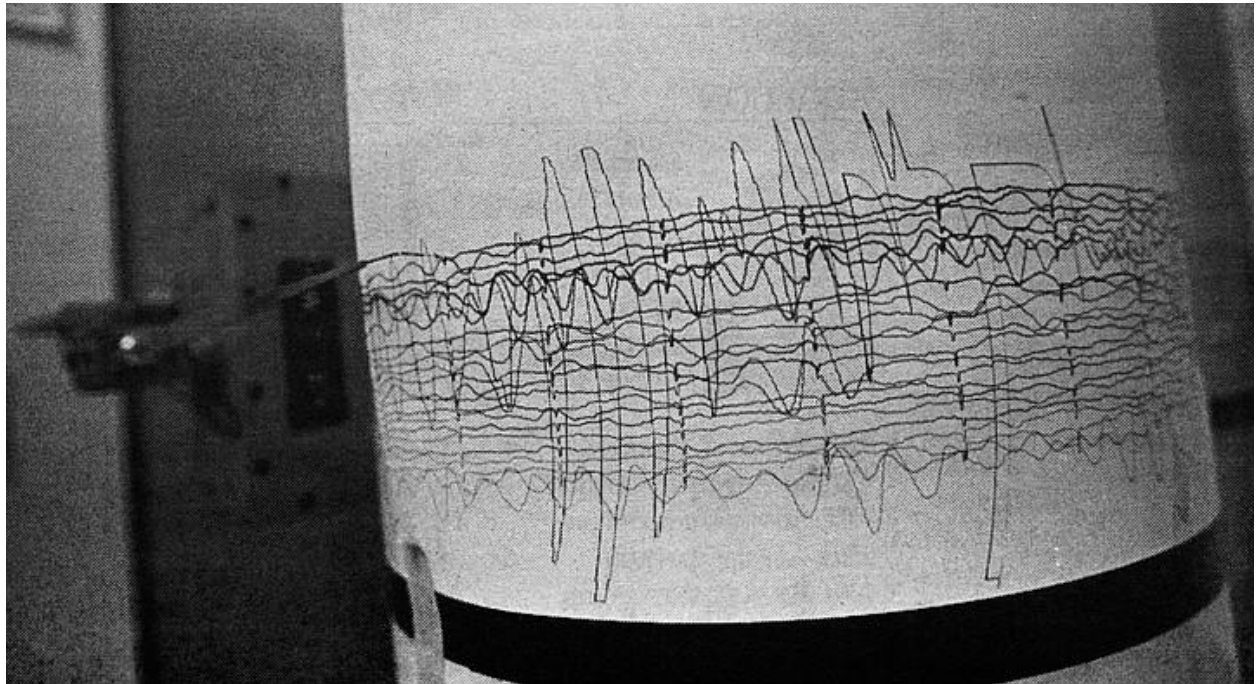
June 30, 1994

Music scene



Earthquake aftermath, Sherman Oaks

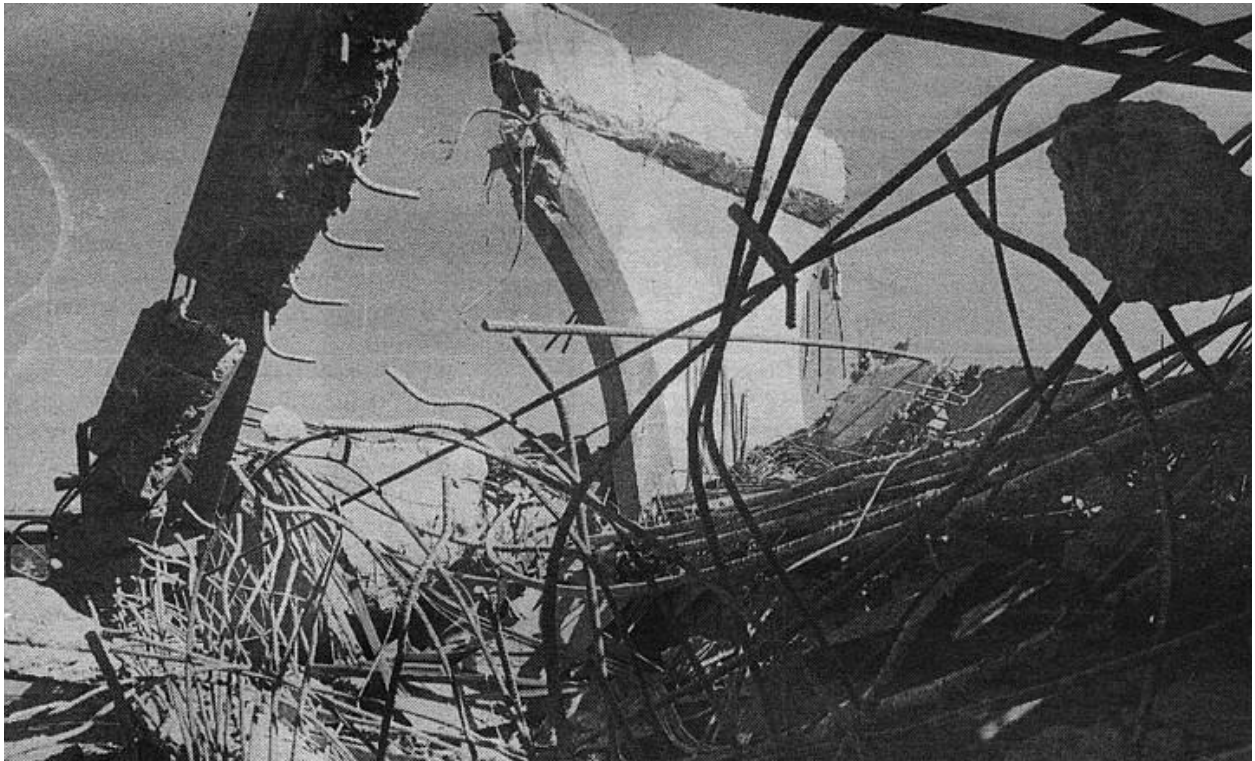
Getting rid of records, right, because of the goddamn quake. Like bricks, dead albums fall heavy. They fell and they fell — hard — and in five months of aftershocks have fallen some more. Less hard but still. Bricks I have too — I use them as bookends, as paperweights — and they fell, hard, loud and heavy, if not nearly as far. Less high on shelves, and less of 'em. I have THREE THOUSAND jazz albums, man, at least a thousand rock albs, and who knows how many hundreds of blues, reggae, R&B, folk, comedy, novelty, whatnot. Whew.



Dead I say because they're fucking obsolete. I hardly play any anymore. Don't think I've listened to 30 in the last year. When I'm sitting writing I can't be bothered with in and out of sleeves, dust 'em, 20-minute sides, get up, turn 'em over, change and care for 'em.



Much as I try to evade such inevitabilities, like any other schmuck I'm a creature in the end of topical hands historically dealt. Easy chases out less easy. And although no audiophile snob, or audiophile anything, I admit the pops and cracks of long-loved vinyl bother me; the warps. Though my equipment is nowhere good enough to allow me to encounter/experience the true glorious wonderfulness of CD sound (if such biz be not mere hype but true), original digital recordings so far *sound okay to me*.



Then I think of all my poor records — how angry do you want me to be? I amass this massive stack — a collection, more than a collection, almost a library (people come over just to hear stuff; mags call me with “fact check” questions) — many many many of which will never be issued on CD I would bet my pud. Easy decommissioning less easy, they’ve become soundless bric-a-brac. Do they still even make styluses?



I pick 'em off the floor, restack 'em, shelf upon shelf, left to right, A to Z. Some cover damage but no breakage, thank heck I'm not 20 years older and they're 78s. But what an empty chore, what an everlasting gig — it dawns on me — like I'm saving/preserving dusty, crumbly museum pieces. Feeling like a Flying Wallenda (speaking of all-fall-down), I flash on that line from their penultimate crackup: *ich kann nicht mehr halten*. One Wallenda tells the others he can't hold it no more — just prior to dropping them — and I can't keep this up much longer myself. If I can imagine having nothing — move the epicenter a dozen miles and we're talking Nothing — I can live with less of Something, a lot less something, easy. But dropping to this less rather than *that* less could be one tough slide. (Better keep a ladder and a net.)

Some choices are snaps. Any LPI haven't played in 13 years, or played only once, back when I first got it, or that surprises me to see now still around at all. Like the Niels-Henning Orsted Pederson Quartet, *Dancing on the Tables*, an import on Steeplechase, with Dave Liebman, John Scofield, Billy Hart. Did I even play it once? The guy's a passable first-unit European bass player, no Oscar Pettiford but what the hey, kind of at times an old-fashioned joke compared to contempo Euros like, for ex., Peter Kowald and Maarten Altena, but he'll do. He's on ten billion albums, behind everybody from Bud Powell to Lee Konitz to Anthony Braxton, he's consistent, dependable, blah blah blah, but I picked this up (used) only because it featured him as leader. Which is no reason in even the laziest of times to keep something — spinning once and forgetting — and no reason nohow now.

Or the eponymous *Codona* — Don Cherry, Collin Walcott, Nana Vasconcelos — on ECM. Sitar (Walcott) in a front-line jazz setting? C'mon. This one I don't think I even got through the first listen, and kept it only 'cause it's long been my wont to be a Don Cherry completist — hey, he worked with Ornette Coleman, played some *great* seminal trumpet in the late '50s, early to mid '60s — a luxury I can no longer afford so fuck it, g'bye, G'bye too to Don's mid-'70s *Hear and Now* on Atlantic (annoying neo-fusionish bullcrap) and *Brown Rice* on A&M/Hori-zon (ditto and worse). And speaking of Ornette-derived completisms, Charlie Haden's *Folk Song* (with Jan Garbarek and Egberto Gismonti, on ECM), g'bye to that too. And *Exploring the Scene* by "The Poll Winners" — Barney Kessel, Ray Brown, and Shelly Manne — on Ornette's original label, Contemporary, which I've saved unplayed for the last 11 years on one pretext only: a tepid run-through of Ornette's "The Blessing" (along with "So What," "The Duke," "Doodlin'," etc.) cut in August '60 — possibly the earliest recording of an Ornette tune by somebody else: 'bye.

Other “affiliations” that can go: *Double, Double You* by Kenny Wheeler (played straight man a couple times for Braxton, but his sound, his tone, has always made my skin crawl); *Expansions* by McCoy Tyner (so what if he turned cartwheels with John Coltrane, ‘s no way I feel like hearing him *this* week with Hubert Laws and Gary Bartz); *Night Music* by Woody Shaw (who recorded with Eric Dolphy a year before Eric died, and thought of himself — even if it rarely showed — as Coltrane-influenced, but other-wise/even so...keep it).

There’re some people I was never a completist for, or if I was I didn’t mean to be, like Stan Getz — nobody needs 24 Stan Getz albums. Especially post-bossa nova trash on Columbia — *Another World*; ‘80s repackage *The Lyrical Stan Getz* — and RCA — *A Song After Sundown*, with Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops. Or okay, Horace Silver, 17 albums, fine, but 19? So I jettison Silver yn Wood, featuring “The Tranquilizer Suite,” and *That Healin Feelin*, the one with him in a turban, nice cover — but he’s also on electric piano, and oh those vocals (*ulp*) by Andy Bey.

Speaking of which, vocal albs I’ve saved just for the backup musicians: Helyne Stewart, *Love Moods* (Contemporary), with Teddy Edwards, Art Pepper, Jack Sheldon, Frank Rosolino (pleasant but really no big deal); Vi Velasco, *Cantando Bossa Nova* (*Means Singing the Bossa Nova*) (Colpix), with Zoot Sims (she’s Filipino, looks something like Connie Francis, sings bossa nova versions of “I Got Rhythm” and “Cheek to Cheek”); Sandi Shoe-make, *Slowly* (Discovery), with Tommy Flanagan (worst vocal version ever of Charlie Parker’s “Yardbird Suite,” and that’s including the *famous* bad one — with Parker himself — by Earl Coleman). I hardly break a sweat parting with these.

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Acone; no, a narrow isosceles triangle, rotated so its vertex is pointed at 196... 5. It’s pointed at ‘65 and possibly ‘64 but pointed *from* (and *in*) ‘66, where it. I. She. Whom I needn’t specify—first or second love — it doesn’t matter. Stick-figure knee bent.

Down. From standing you’re sitting. Kneeling. Knees buckle under me. The violence of the shock, the shock of the admission, have canceled my underpinning. She is “seeing” her dance teacher — “taken up” with — it doesn’t matter. Bottom. Fall down all Downfall. Twenty-one years until knepeat. Till the next kneetime. Jolts-to-come and jolts come, many shapes and sizes, but no bends, measurable and involuntary, till the first aftershock to the first earthquake big enough, I don’t remember how big, numerically — not a big one — I had the hap to experience in vivo; intense enough to make the wood not only creak but *smell*, the beams, the foundation being rattled,

battled, everything held up by old failing timber — a toothpick in the wind. And ever since.

But then. That quake like this one I was in bed. Woke me. No time to get up under, whatever they tell you, a doorjamb. Car alarms off in the street. The TV moved two inches. Paint chips on the floor. Particles settling in the walls. An hour later, another one. My knees shook — slackened — what they held shook; I hadda sit down. I'd been on boats before, I'd lurched, rocked — this was totally different. The sea supports you — they call it "buoyancy" — but not (I now knew) land: solid was no longer solid, and terra firma something less than firm.

And every time since. For weeks after a quake every tremor, every little baby rumble — every time a truck goes by — I feel in my hinges this is It Again. The bigger It tho, it for Real: this time it's *all coming down*. On these hinges hang the limits of my courage on earth — this slaying planet — nothing not killed by it — but it's not death fear we're talking, or dying fear, or rather: nothing is *added* in the process to my rocksteady awe of annihilation, to an already metastatic dread of lousy endings.

'Cause if you want death fear, I could show you some death fears — A-bombs, polio — how about tetanus? — and all they've ever done is freeze the hinges. The flaps. Immobilized, I couldn't stand even as a prelude to falling. Rigored without the mortis. This seismic baloney leaves room for collapse — flaps oiled — fold — like a ton of potatoes. But greater than potatoes or meat is the weight of a troublesome image, and I ain't talking beams on my skull in the bath, a cantilever or two thru my thorax.

Which occurs to me, yeah, you bet, and yeah it's unnerving, but the vividder aftermath, from where I stand-and-fall, is not me in rubble but — there's a lotta butts in this section — all my goddamn contingent *things*; not my own death or dismemberment but the tenuous safety of my discs, my books, my favored flannel shirts, the strew and spew of all my damn *hobbies*. My precious junk with no roof or walls to protect it. The awful burden of property come home to roost.

The time, the time, who's got the time? Too many objects of the round plastic variety demand special CONSIDERATION, won't let me part with them before at least one final listen — "just to be sure" — no weed-out without a spin....

Stephane Grappelli, *I Remember Django* (with Barney Kessel) and *Young Django* (with Philip Catherine and Larry Coryell). Never my favorite violinist, and I've got 98 percent of everything he ever did with Django Reinhardt anyway — who needs simulations? — so I play 'em... not much... begone!

Elvin Jones, *The Ultimate* (with Joe Farrell and Jimmy Garrison). In the years he was with Coltrane, Elvin took the p.o.v. of jazz drumming a full half-step beyond Philly Joe Jones and kept it there, but since Trane his playing has never been the same. Not to these ears anyway, not on this one.

Tomasz Stanko Quintet, *Music for K*, on a Polish label (Muza) with a flimsy black-and-white cover. Don't remember anything about this, let's see...quasi- (or pseudo-) free playing by trumpet, alto, tenor w/bass and drums, sort of an alternate Art Ensemble of Chicago using Count Basie horn sonorities (and licks)...I'll live without.

Flip Phillips, *Phillips' Head*. Bass clarinet — ho hum — theme from *Love Story*...go 'way.

Earle Spencer and His Orchestra, *The Almost Forgotten Pioneer of Modern Big Band Jazz*, issued by the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors. Art Pepper's on here, Lucky Thompson, Jimmy Knepper too, but the full band SINGS verses to "Oh! You Beautiful Doll" — *yowch* — cancel the almost in Freeway overpass this household.

Now this should be fun: Hampton Hawes. Starting with 18 LPs — most of which I found in bargain bins after reading his autobio, *Raise Up Off Me*, a good one, although good books, good stories, ain't good playing, though actually he did play oke, oke enough, even if it tended to be a little florid and prechoreographed — I weed (in a week) down to four. Yay.

Basie: I get rid of 26 (from 63 to 37). Albums backing up singers (Tony Bennett, Kay Starr, Billy Eckstine, Sinatra, the Mills Brothers), a James Bond tribute, almost everything from the late years on Pablo. But I save (for perversity sake) *Basie on the Beatles*, with notes by Ringo.

Not too many people at this point are exempt from weed-down: Ornette, Parker, Dolphy, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Lester Young, Albert Ayler, Cecil Taylor, and — or so I thought — Duke Ellington. But the Duke's session with Teresa Brewer, *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing*, screams for review. I was an Ellington completist, I'm still an Ellington completist — got 118 by him — and this is one of his last studio recordings (Sept. 4/73), but I don't EVER again wanna hear Teresa sing "I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good"...pshaw!

Formerly exempt: Dizzy Gillespie. Drop a sad needle on *The Melody Lingers On*, a piece of shit from '66 — covers of "Winchester Cathedral," "Cherry, Cherry,"

"Cherish," "Bang! Bang!" and such generic perennials as "Tequila" and "Portuguese Washerwoman" ...the fucking nerve.

Three more Don Cherrys with a tad too much fartin' around "Eastern" style, main offender being *Organic Music*, a two-record set with vintage psychedelic art (swans and elephants holding flowers, boys and girls with third eyes living in harmony with their geodesic dome) and 16 tons of drone-y pap...unlistenable.

Nine Mai Waldrons since '70 can go go GO: ponderous monotonous; if I hadn't seen him live once with Philly Joe I'd never've acquired these.

Four by Sonny Rollins on Milestone, in their own right as big an embarrassment as the Dizzy LP. He doesn't even "have a way" with unlikely standards anymore, no more irony, likewise no more "great literalism," just dreck: "Dancing in the Dark," "I'll String Along with You," "I'm Old Fashioned" — painful.

Then I come across these, um, what to call 'em: documents of human pathos (Jazz Division). Never the basis of, or occasion for, anything exactly akin to sonic experience, just weary objects kept (and kept!) lest the bloody bleeping world scream and cry. Spotlight on:

Bobby Timmons, *Little Barefoot Soul*, his first album on Prestige after leaving Riverside. The notes talk about how only Bobby and bassist Sam Jones showed up for this '64 session (a quintet date!), phone calls all over town finally got 'em, Ray Lucas on drums — pretty uninteresting fare, coulda been called *Little Shallow Soul* (cover is a quasi-pretty hair-straightened black woman sitting in picnic grass) — saved it all these years for the sheer, yes yes yes, poignancy of the operation. Does anybody else still own a copy of this? You want it, you can have it. (Bobby died of alcoholism in the mid '70s.)

Roger "Ram" Ramirez, *Lover Man* (French RCA). One of three hyphenates credited with authorship of "Lover Man," here he's featured in trio settings with guys like George Duvivier, Oliver Jackson, Ed Shaughnessy. Got it cheap (accidentally marked \$3.98 although an import) but I've only played it once until now — just a pale gamut of colorless pianisms — sorry, Ram, this is adieu.

George M'lely, *The Soloist*. Ugly cover, not bad but not especially distinctive. Half a step up from a vanity pressing (on Alternatives in American Music, an Albany label with a P.O. box), and one cut, "Village Scene (Greenwich 1961)," suggests he's been at it for ages.. .boo hoo, hate to be mean, but so long, sailor.

Ich kann nicht mehr halten, and likewise *nicht mehr* carry all this matter on my back. To the next place, wherever the hell that is. Slimming down my load in prep for Finally leaving this gigglepit. I don't wanna die here, but that's hardly it: I don't wanna live here. Eighteen years in one crummy town is bad enough; 18 in L.A. has been like 81 in Alphaville. I know, I know: I've said it before. This time I swear it. I've had enough.

What clinched it — natch — was local broadcast coverage of the thing. For all of us not dead, maimed, or homeless, this 6.8er was dubbed a “loud, rude wake-up call.” By the numbers were listed all the standard familiar right moves to make in preparation for “next time” (and the ongoing unending after-math of this time) — stockpile plenty of water, flashlights (w/spare batteries), a good, sturdy pair of shoes, stay away from power lines, under doorjamb, turn off the gas, etc. — everything but eat your spinach — but no mention was made of road maps or airline schedules OUT OF HERE — none! Not one “newsperson” even *suggested* making plans to move. (Imagine the impact on property values if people “prematurely” started selling; on the 100-plus-year-old Pyramid Scheme that is L.A.) Seismologist Kate Hutton came on to tell us, well, this freeway collapsed, that one lost so many off-ramps, some other one severely buckled, but it didn't happen to *all* of them, mind you, so freeways are (dig this)...safe! Crowd control as per usual... *self* control (the town that knows How!).. .ho-fucking-hum. Oh, does this place love to lie to itself!

Shoot — I've wanted out for at least 15 years, but as fate would have it I'm involved with — addicted to — someone who likes it here, or if “like” is too strong a word she works here (and is addicted to *it*). An actress. The “real” kind they don't even want here, don't write parts for — an open sore at a cocktail party. When she's turned down for the parts they do write I tell her, “You should be grateful Hell doesn't want you,” but she scoffs. Now even she wants out, but it's tenuous. The longer we go since the last tremor, the closer we are to the next — right? — but to her it means a longer-forgotten sensation of terror. (There are days she wants to stay and be rejected.) Her beat and battered apartment building — there's a big *bulge* in one outer wall — meantime seems just one more significant aftershock away from being condemned, if not collapsing.

Fuggit. All this talk about the “Big One,” our long-overdue 8.0 on the San Andreas, is so much diversionary claptrap. When every address in town has its own personal “minor fault” right under it, ready to rock with, oh, only a 5- or 6-point-something temblor, L.A. is the world's biggest eggshell waiting to crack. At least it's most massively populated. ...And crack.

Yes! They can happen anywhere! In St. Louis or Dover, Delaware. But they WILL happen here. So drop the bullshit. What sort of immoral slime allowed (encouraged!) construction/expansion/migration to continue (accelerate!) following the 1931 Long Beach quake (speaking of wake-up calls), inviting new rubes to live here and die, or their children and/or grandchildren die, and/or lose all instantaneous/forever? Read *City of Quartz* for the answer.

Meantime: aftershock reports on TV are getting more skittish, more I-want-my-mommy, as time rumbles on...’s getting harder for the monsters to lie (in real time) with a straight monster face.

Once a week I load my car with heaps of vinyl, drive to a 20-minute-distant record store and unload. The wonders of purgation: every unload feels like six months of shit expelled. So far I’ve parted with 700 jazz LPs, and the store guy’s comments always make for good two-way barbershop conversation.

How can I part with *Dixieland Jam* by the Eddie Condon All-Stars, he wonders in earnest. Vic Dickenson plays trombone on only half the cuts, I tell him, not mentioning also that I really can’t stand Eddie (one of his faves) and bought it in the first place only for Vic. Haven’t I listened, he asks, really listened, to Tom Harrell’s *Stories*? Okay, I say, he’s a diagnosed schizophrenic (and the cover shows him as a disembodied face in shadow), but his playing is so conventional — fine as such but so what. Why’d I ever buy the British reissue of *I’ve Got You Under My Skin* by Georgie Auld with Jud Conlon’s Rhythmaires? Well, it wasn’t for the cover (’50s-type dame with big tits, what looks like a suede blouse, attempted sleaze but it’s all too straight, flowers at her neck—she vaguely resembles Joan Crawford), and I haven’t played it in so long I don’t remember anything except that I didn’t like it, so my best guess is I got it after seeing Georgie at Donte’s and my gal Louise coerced me into buying it on a trip to Tower where I’d otherwise have gotten away with buying nothing.

I’m not even selling this garbage — I’m trading. For CDs of stuff I love and/or need — can’t imagine living w/out — which by virtue of their format should outlive (as potentially non-silent matter) the demise of the turntable and stylus. (Until the next forcible format change.) The good news/bad news is the conversion rate: 15 to 1 approx., LP to disc; what a sap I feel (though I certainly never intended this as an investment). Even hobbies, insofar as they’re perpetually feasible, are frigging pyramid schemes. (But less matter is less matter.)

I check the racks and find individual CDs of Eric Dolphy’s *Outward Bound* and *Out to Lunch*, Warne Marsh’s *A Ballad Album*, 3-CD sets of Basie, *The Complete Decca*

Recordings, and Ellington, *The Blanton-Webster Band*, and have them order *The Complete Charlie Parker on Verve* (10 CDs), Thelonious Monk — *The Complete Riverside Recordings* (15), and John Coltrane — *The Prestige Recordings* (16) — that should eat up the rest of my credit slip.

Every day, lest I lose the momentum to get the hell out of here (to Austin? Portland? Albuquerque?), I make a point of reminding myself, not just intellectually but sensorially, of WHAT IT FELT LIKE, four-something in the morning, whatever time it was, the moment it hit. No movie, and that includes *Earthquake*, with the possible exception of *The Two Jakes*, has ever gotten the sound of it right. When I moved from New York I thought earthquakes would sound like moving subway cars. They sound like whatever space you're in being played like a drum. My apartment drum began as loud this time as any I'd heard and got louder, and louder. And faster. And faster. It didn't seem possible the sticks could play any faster without breaking, either themselves or the various drum heads — walls, ceiling, floor — so my assumption was they all were breaking by the second. I could also hear all kinds of stuff toppling, falling, but without a light (power went out instantly) I couldn't gauge what or how much. Meanwhile there was this crazy bang-bang vertical thrust to it which I'd never felt in any previous quake. When I stood up to get under something I felt lifted; every step was like something at a funhouse, wherever my feet made contact the floor seemed to have lumps. (Later I would discover the water glass beside my bed to be empty, though it hadn't tipped over.)

I realized this was by far the largest whatsis I'd experienced and simultaneously thought, *Oh shit — there goes today's writing at least*. When I thought to get my flashlight from the spot I always kept it, it had moved. I tripped over I knew not what en route to the only light in the place — the pilot on my gas heater (my stove has electric ignition), which to what avail I wasn't sure (there being 12 units in my building, and a boom from one would no doubt be a boom to all) I shut off. Failing again to find the flashlight, all the while fighting the urge to go back to sleep, at least till sunup, I (or the Boy Scout in me) tripped a couple more times, put on my glasses, the shirt and pants I'd worn the night before, a jacket, tried in vain to get into a pair of leather-soled shoes with buckles, which was just as well since (it worked out) I'd be walking, managed to get into a pair of track shoes, and stumbled into walls on my way to the street.

Somehow remembering where I'd last parked my car, I groped through the trunk in total black (though some claim stars were as visible as in the country, I didn't see many, and there wasn't much moon) for a flashlight I'd never before had occasion to use and beamed it at nearby structures — nothing had collapsed. I walked a block north to the semi-major thoroughfare I'd be taking if I drove — without overhead

illumination, open trenches from sewer work made things look hairy, if not in fact impassable — and too tired to mess with it, I walked on. Flicking the light every so often to avoid tripping over garbage cans, I passed a mile and a half of shattered storefront windows before turning off to Louise's place.

Where I met and greeted her shock, dread, relief at seeing me, but no immediately discernible damage, no yet-discernible anything (it would be 17 hours before neighborhood power would be restored). The first thing I heard on her battery-powered radio was a report from the Valley where, in addition to fires, some news bozo had encountered "extensive damage to water mains and water coolers" — say what? So stiff an upper professional lip, or so California frozen cool, that the effort it took to speak at all vanquished any and all subsidiary effort to posit a thought while so doing: fuck this place. (Boy oh boy do I want out.)

Paring down my rock stash has thus far proven more difficult. The problem is, what's currently there is the *result* of multiple pare-downs. It's the one subset of my collection I've always periodically sought to reduce. Used to get promos of this junk, right, and my policy has always been *when in doubt, dump*. Still, some long-treasured titles do now scream, "Dump me already!" — so I will....

The Move, their first alb on Regal Zonophone, never released in the states; later they mutated into (among other things) ELO. Saved basically for one cut, "Fire Brigade," with its big ironic Duane Eddy riff, and for the fact that my sister got it for me in England in '68 — I was still interested in British Invasion oddities, even late B.I. — which isn't enough for me to hold onto it another 25 years.

Ditto, the first LP by Pink Floyd, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, which I actually gave the first U.S. review (in *Crawdaddy*; "Purpal Doodee" was my title) but haven't played once since 1969 or '70.

Nico, *Chelsea Girl*. Jackson Browne wrote a couple of the tunes and plays on them, and I used to go see them play at the Dom, spring '67, when Jackson cut a great demo for Elektra (I still have a cassette of it), stronger and more interesting times 50 than the rest of what he would later record put together, but I've never really cared for Nico (any more than for late Jackson), in or out of the Velvet Underground.

Suburban Lawns. Late-'70s L.A. punk with the not-half-bad Su Tissue (who ended up in Jonathan Demme films), but the prospect of occasionally hearing her only fully decent cut, "Unable" ("I...can't...bag-a your love"), does not motivate me to retain all 12 inches in perpetuity, let alone play it now.

D.O.A., *Triumph of the Ignoroids*. Kept mainly for its use of the famous “snatch photo” of Maggie Trudeau (to go with the cut “Rich Bitch”), that and the guitarist’s great name, Joe Shithead.

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark. Ditto, name.

Max’s Kansas City 1976. Nothing on here ever meant anything to me except the Pere Ubu cut, “Final Solution,” and that mostly because Peter Laughner (whom I used to correspond with — what a grim fuck — and Lester Bangs wrote an obit for) plays on and possibly cowrote it: “I don’t need a drug/I need a final solution” — indeed.

Love It to Death. Kept, long unplayed, the only Alice Cooper album I’ve ever owned, only for the obscure “Ballad of Dwight Frye,” not (ot not especially for the once-famous “I’m Eighteen.”

Golden Hits of the Shangri-Las. Purchased back when I was writing what became *The Aesthetics of Rock*, in which they garnered a couple-three pages of over-attention. I’ll miss it (but not that much).

And then there’s some I’d actually love to abandon — they’re just taking up space — but as I handle ‘em they demand a listen, just one cut, half a cut, hook me anew, and I’m stuck with them, possibly for eternity: “Chihuahua” by Bow Wow Wow (on the *See Jungle! See Jungle!* album), “Carnal” by the Passage (on *Pin-drop*), “White Sport Coat” by Marty Robbins (on an otherwise worthless two-record anthology), and so many more, why even list ‘em (I’m such a bourgeois simp).

And in what possible eternity — or plausible old age — will I ever sit and play 3 percent of all this crap?

Los Angeles magazine cover story: “200 Reasons Not to Leave L.A.” — what insidious tripe. What they oughta now be selling, advising, even the crowd controllers: proceed — slowly — to the prospect of leaving (relocation loans available: let the flicking developers, planning commissions and freeway contractors underwrite it); if you stay, don’t use a freeway or a mall; wear helmets to theaters if you must see *Schindler’s List* (speaking of holocausts); spread the word.

Aside from which, it’s already over. On an average non-cloudy weekday afternoon, you’d have to look and look (and wait and wait) to spot three tour buses at the Farmer’s Market. The F.M. post office, once a teeming polyglot squirm for postcard postage, has no lines anymore. Outsiders evidently know something residents don’t — or do and deny. After the insurrection, the so-called riots, of ‘92, sojourning out-

of-town rats were still jumping on this sinking ship...well, no more. Whatever the draw ever was — “glamour”? a wall-to-wall “natural beauty”? The conspicuous, rancid display of “wealth”? — the spit that held *that* storyboard together is going, going, soon to be g-g-gone.

A projection: one more *non*-big one sufficient to disrupt filmmaking for even a week, to contribute substantially, for instance, to travel time (and hence expense) to shooting locations, to spook into departure enough resident beings whose faces and bodies familiarly appear in its product — not to mention its backers, makers, “creators” — and the film industry will as one, not piece by piece, studio by studio, project by project (as has been the case for years now anyway), pack up and leave for some Arizona or Carolina of the mind and/or map — gone, finis, end of routine. At which point this town without pity, minus its principal source of fascination and allure, and without the machinery to lead its remaining minions by the nose to not only topical x but to (and through) the very DANCE of being led, and is thus no longer even competent to lie to itself, stands revealed as the depressed, and depressing, wasteland it long has truly been, becomes at last an *official* dead city like (let’s say) Detroit.

In any event, money leaves (if not people) and it becomes Mexico City — and I don’t mean ethnically — as this parched strip of shit slowly but surely reverts to geologic, geographic type: first surface glitz (the “beauty”), then basic living conditions (water, power, sanitation, drivable roads — after one subway disaster scotches *that* anti-solution). Just WAIT till local symptomatic relief is deemed *not* a priority by the state, the feds, and the who-shall-live-and-who-shall-die’ers tell a decidedly unglamorous L.A., just as Ford once told New York, to drop dead. End of pyramid.

New sounds in my building. Its stresses and balance points have changed. Often there’s this tick-tick-tick, ominous though less like a bomb than a bug or a muted woodpecker, sometimes in a window frame, sometimes in the walls. And the buses and garbage trucks keep passing, jostling things and racing my heart like a poorly tuned ’65 Mustang, and even when they don’t: reminders. Vibrations you can’t even feel have an impact. Like the bubble-over of a geologic unconsciousness, this hooley loosens bulbs in their sockets — they begin to flicker, you check the fixtures, the wiring, finally you just tighten ’em. If only I could tighten the 40-watt bulb which illumines my life: a bag of sand ripe to run gut-open thru the cracks in the floor.

I don’t leave home these days, not even around the corner for a sandwich, without a satchel containing: flashlight, glasses, contact lens cleaning and wetting solution, floppy disc copies of everything I’m currently working on.

Not once since that morning in January have I had four hours' continuous sleep.

Nor have I turned the gas heater back on (some nights have been *cold*).

Portland? This week it looks like Portland. I've never minded rain.

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Best Of

Four pretend guests rate the Hotel del Coronado

Reservations

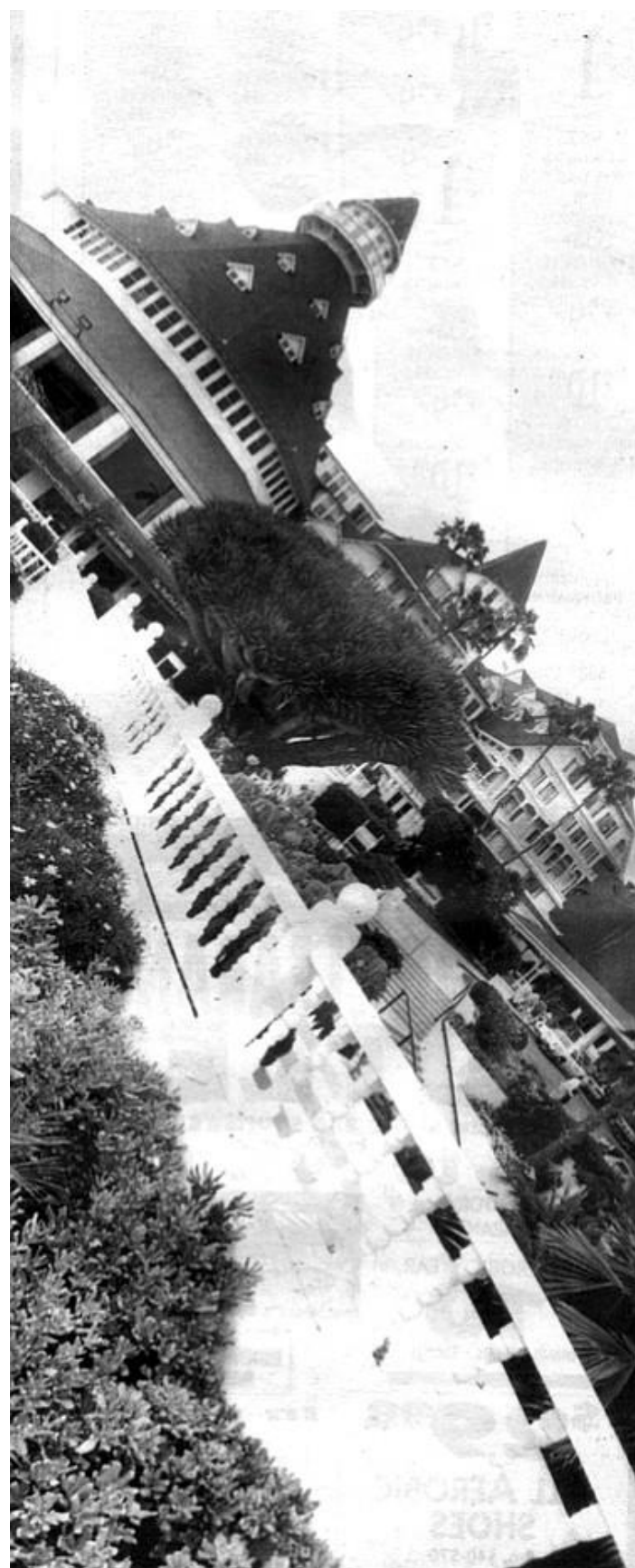
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Feature Stories



Hotel Del. Well it certainly put me in a good mood, I was in the lap of luxury. No, not exactly the lap of luxury — but close enough.

No Zeus, No Rasputin at the Hotel Del

- (*Borneo Jimmy edits the “Booze and Cigars” column for The Paris Review and co-writes, with Georges Bataille, “Imbibing This Month” for National Geographic.*)

There are no bar stools at the Palm Court bar — just comfy, cushy wing chairs — which should immediately TELL US SOMETHING. And oh the drinks were shit! Or if not shit, weak. Or if not weak, disappointing.



The Ramoz Fizz was like a nutmeg milkshake. OK, I know. Mixed drinks after all exist to mask the ale. — the acrid intensity of C_2H_5OH — it's in fact their only function...but c'mon. 'S got no heat, no punch — what so freaking ever — under all that dairy glop. Okay, well, an R.F. does require a certain knack, and maybe its art, its craft, is that of a bygone era, so how's about we try a perennial favorite like oh, say, a Tom Collins — now *that* should be easy.

Bartender!

Mmm, looks yummy — sip, swig — tastes like grapefruit — did he say GRAPEFRUIT? — pshaw!!



So I try another, I order another, and whut whut? — he don't know how. Doesn't know a Zeus. Is not familiar with it (1 oz. vodka, 1 -1/2 oz. Campari, fill w/ ice, lemon twist.) Well, okay, then make it a Blood and Sand — 1 oz. gin, 1 oz. sloe gin, single large cube

of ice. Don't know it either. And if I've gotta tell him — well — I would certainly rather he know it himself (is it asking too much?) in his mixographic bones. Nor does he know, well, *all* the great barkeeps of Europe and Connecticut know, even the average, even the *lousy* barkeeps know, but not *this* highly trained professional — the crème de la crème de la fabuloolous HOTEL DEL — who does not know, and cannot prepare: a Rasputin (2 oz. vodka, 1/2 oz. clam juice, anchovy-stuffed black olive)...an RAF Cocktail (1 oz. scotch, 1 oz. cognac, straight up — a “man’s drink”)...a Whoopsy (1-1/2 oz. Pernod, 1/2 oz. sauterne, dash of Angostura bitters)...aTwoFiftyTwo(1 oz. 151-proof rum, 1 oz. WildTurkey 101)...a Burnt Sienna (1/2 oz. Kahlua, 1-1/2 oz. carrot juice, sprig of cilantro)...so what to get instead??



Everywhere you look: crowns. Walls, ceiling. Part of the decor. Crowns like kings wear. Crowns? — oh I get it: *coronado*. “Crowned.” Okay, crown me: I will have a Seagram’s Royal Crown, soda back. Swell — great — at last we’re getting somewhere; now a tall glass of port...what? \$7.50 for a short pop of Sandeman Founders Reserve (\$14.39 a three-quarter LITER, on average, wherever fine spirits are sold)?!



Harumph, harumph...just enough left for a fine cigar; *migod*. They want \$4.95 for an oh my, I forgot to take note of the BRAND OF CIGAR — no notepad (no memory!) — you call me a writer?? (The Shame! the Shame!) So gosh damn embarrassed I can not can *not stand myself*. Can't fake it — Can't take it — I can't go on...



Nineteen Postcards from the Hotel D.C.

- (*Applejack Meltzer, filmmaker and poet, is the cousin of frequent Reader contributor Richard Meltzer. His latest collection of verse, Tropic of Nipples, is scheduled for mid-fall release by Black Sparrow.*)

Jerry — LuAnne thinks it's Disneyland, I think it's a generic large hotel. Every time you turn around there's a Leroy Nieman painting. Only one, but turn around it's there: horses & dogs romping along the beach outside the hotel; yellow, orange, brown, white, blue (not a print). Horses?

Sponsored

-Applejack



Terry — Why the eff am I here? To write postcards and piss rainbows (it's a living). Have got NO INTEREST in the place, believe me. It doesn't intrigue me, nothing. I'd just as soon be in Lima, Ohio — honest.

-A. Meltzer

Dottie — Very good turkey at the Del Deli — name that decor. "Cave"? "Mineshaft"? "Undersea grotto"? Formerly a seafood takeout? "I Hear a Symphony" and "Penny Lane" on some local oldies station.

-Appie

Scottie — At the Del Deli (open 24 hrs.). Johnny Carson, no, the pseudo-Johnny Carson — dressed just like Johnny circa 70 — eats all the chicken but leaves behind a carrot in his piping hot matzo ball soup.

-Mr. Apples

Snottie — Not as authentically (or even bogusly) chintz-elegant as the Horton Grand. Or as distinctively fake-old. Draperies are *painted* on the wall above the bed. Acrylic or oils? Too high to tell.

-A.J.

Francis — Could you film *Dracula* here? No. Wrong atmos. If armadillos crawled across the lobby carpet it would not feel any more "gothic." (Ditto for rats.)

-Applejacula

Eunice — Twilight at the Ocean Terrace Lounge — stink of popcorn for a five o'clock mile. Ocean, ocean, where's the ocean? Not rhetorical (nor apparent) — let me ask. Why of course, heh heh, THERE: 200-300-400 yards beyond the tennis courts. Surf's up!

-A.M. in the P.M.

Punis — A "pleasant" breakfast at the Ocean Terrace Restaurant. Buttermilk pancakes with a side of strawbs. Eggs benedict and tea with lemon. Buttermilk

pancakes with — I already said that. On the whatsit with the check: "We prefer Visa — Thank you." (Eat my dick.)

-Grouchjack Meltz

Doc Flogger — As I live and bathe, the running water is remarkably, preternaturally, SOFT. I wouldn't kid ya. Softest eau west of the Rockies? And east.

-Jack M.

Sir Tooty — At the Prince of Wales Grille with an e: flaming spinach salad, w/ brandy or somesuch for fuel. Yugg — sweet — should've been sterno. On the far wall: HONNI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE. The waiter must be Belgian.

-Honest A. Meltzer

Scoopy — Vegetables on my lobster plate: beet, asparagus, baby corn, baby tomato, tater, some strange sort of radish. Total vegetable mass, about that of a large gallstone. Shellfish, howev, is something to write home about (so write my mom for me, o.k.?).

-Hap the Hippo

Pus Pup — Says LuAnne of her lamb chop: "If I got to also eat some of your lobster, and if this happened to be my last meal, it would be acceptable." ("Autumn Leaves" on the piano by some guy who 40 years ago heard Bud Powell — and never forgot.)

-Apple Butt

Thumbs — A sight for eyes: conventioners in SWEATERS no money can buy. Where could you buy one? Patternless purple/puce. Green and yellow diamonds. Map of Texas. Grandmas, Martians, blind people knitted them for Xmas. It is crueller to give than receive.

-Applejacque

Weewee — Piano off the lobby. LovesSeats with lovesitters. Baldy in a snazz shirt plays "Sophisticated Lady," Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa," a Spanish-tinged "Goodbye" segueing into "Granada." This is not a place to fart.

-Reverend Meltzer

Pope Leo — Palm Court Bar. A Leroy Nieman lookalike, human, to his short blonde hi-heeled date: "What I think I'm trying to say is I would like to get together with you." She stiffens. Later, they kiss. Later, sits on his lap. Next table, six cigar smokers. Great smoke!

-A/Jack Melts Her

Senator Boxer — Doesn't seem "serious" enough a dump for any really nasty nazi fascist lifethreatening b.s. to be transacted. For planning then faxing the next massive turning of the screw. But neither is San Diego in general. L.A., Seattle, even San Francisco, but this cozy playpen of zzzz — nope. Benign!

-Franklin D. Meltzer

God of the Jews — Do any lobby women look like whores? No lobby women look like whores. Is the whore look different at the Hotel Del? Do whores here wear grey corporate business dresses?

-Apple Jackoff

Fat Willie — "For Your Safety and Protection: The City of Coronado has an 11 p.m. curfew for minors 17 years of age and under. To cooperate with the City Police, we ask your assistance in observing this curfew." (Blow me.)

-AP

Junius! — Tantamonny Sochek is playing! "Twist King of the Finger Lakes"! In the Pottawottabotta Room! All the way from Ithaca, Geneva and Watkins Glen! Twist! Again! Like we did last summer! Tantamonny Sochek!

-A. Lying Jackson

MAKE YOUR OWN FUN

- *(Nita Hapsacker is a fitness instructor from Oceanside.)*

Well it certainly put me in a good mood, I was in the lap of luxury. No, not *exactly* the lap of luxury — but close enough. First of all, forgetting everything else, it was very nice to get away, and sometimes it doesn't matter where you're going so much as *that* you're going and that they say it's good and it's not bad. They said it loud enough and I bought it. It was big and old — you have to respect that. And the ocean was there and the food was very good. I slept well.

But I kind of expected everyone to be more stylishly dressed, I was surprised to see people in shorts and jogging suits, and I liked the way that when we went to one restaurant my husband had to wear a jacket — I thought that was good, because at least it said this is special. And I thought everything would be *more* special. I did see some people dressed kind of in that Palm Springs look. Palm Beach? But not too many.

There was also something faintly musty. Maybe on some level it has to do with age, but there was a slight smell that didn't have to do with *history*. I was in Newport once and took a tour of the house of the Kennedys or somebody, and it was very enormous and old but not musty. The mustiness here was a little artificial, it seemed to come from current problems, as opposed to antiquated problems. Maybe the reason that it wasn't completely luxurious was it's just too much to cope with for all those people who have to do the dance — the staff of the hotel. It would seem an insurmountable task to keep it up to snuff. But it smelled only some of the time, and it wasn't obnoxious. Sometimes in the halls, but not in the rooms.

The cigars in the lounge I didn't mind. Most people can't stand them, but I'm tolerant. It seemed to me that for the time we were in that part of the hotel, and all those smokers were there, it let them have a good time, which was kind of nice — why make a big deal about it? Our room was in the nonsmoking section of the hotel, which was good — I liked that idea. I've never been that big about smoking in hotels, in *bed*, I mean I don't smoke and it does make the air clearer, but then also you don't have to worry about accidental fires — so that's very good. If someone wants to set an intentional fire, they can set it in either smoking or nonsmoking — so I don't worry about it.

We never got around to ordering room service. We were only there one day and had all the places to go. I didn't play tennis. I wanted to, it was inviting, and I watched people play from several angles: from the balcony upstairs, a high window, a restaurant, which was very peaceful, and I watched them as we walked by. I didn't go swimming, it was too cold. Was the pool heated? I don't know. But I wouldn't have gone in anyway, I don't swim. But the point wasn't to go swimming. When some people think of hotels, they think of swimming. Not me. But if there had been a

higher atmospheric temperature, *perhaps* I'd have considered dangling my feet. Don't get the idea, though, the weather wasn't nice. It was excellent, and we took a long walk along the sand — it was lovely.

We didn't have breakfast in the Crown Room because the Unisys people were there. It's an electronics thing, I think — they were on convention. They didn't mix with the regular people, the tourist people, they had enough of their own. I guess they spent an enormous amount to rent the full dining room ahead of time. I also suppose people come from all across the country to have breakfast in the fabulous Crown Room and it's not entirely fair to give it away to Unisys. But it's really no different than if the hotel was full anyway and everyone got up before you did, and went to breakfast before you — I can understand that. I'm flexible. We had lunch in the Crown Room. I wasn't very hungry, but my husband had a nice meal of duck ravioli. This was after we checked out. I had a glass of wine and a capuccino, it was very good. I wonder how long the hotel has been serving capuccino, it's hard to know because they did have karaoke, which is an even newer kind of trend. So maybe capuccino is that type of concept, although actually capuccino is an old, historic kind of coffee, so who knows?

The more I think about it, the karaoke seems so at cross purposes with the image of the place. I heard about this bar in New York where people put on sumo suits and wrestle sumo style — well the karaoke is just another version of that: rake them in to buy drinks and have a mindless "good time." Which I was somewhat disappointed at, that sort of logic, because one would assume that people aren't going there for that. But to the extent that they do have a convention trade, maybe that was the point. Karaoke isn't just for youth anymore, it's now a kind of silly middle-aged let's-have-fun. Seeing it during happy hour was enough to make me go make my own fun, which I did.

I went upstairs and wrote a sentence in my notebook: "A lingering longing of likely soap permeated the air." I love to write in hotels while I'm there. That was the first sentence. Then later: "Don't cry for Jojo, but she missed the boat." That's Jojo Blena, the main character. It's called A NICE DAY IN THE WORLD, and where I got the soap, what made me think of it, was they gave you both a face soap and a bath soap — many hotels only give you one. The sink was quite nice, they had a nice wooden shelf over it. The faucets were very handy, very easy to use, a very nice shape. I have no complaints about it. The mirror was good, and the bath was excellent. They gave you bath salts. The placement of the toilet paper — it was hidden at first, beneath a towel, so people might feel you have to keep your eyes open — but I found it, it was fine, I thought it was perfect. The toilet was fine. My husband pointed out that it was crooked, but believe me, it was just fine. The room was fine. It was very small, but

you know? It didn't seem to matter much, because it was cozy. When they took us on a tour and we saw a suite of rooms, and we saw the bedroom, it was exactly the same, so I didn't feel deprived at all. I didn't feel the room was too hot, though my husband did — I had a very nice sleep. It's a good time to raise the point that not everyone's experience or perception of things is the same.

The TV itself was just fine. The reception was excellent, the size and where it was positioned — they give you a remote, which they should be complimented for, because many hotels don't and no one should encourage that. But what was on TV was terrible. Of course they're only responsible for some of that, some of it has to do with the whole nature of programming, but some has to do with them. They had one station that was just ads for various hotels and sights in San Diego. I would have watched that more if they had had more of the Hotel del Coronado on, I'd have watched it several times before getting bored. But the other hotels could only be watched once before you didn't want any more. And they had CNN and the cable sports station, otherwise it was just normal TV plus advertisements for movies on the pay station. They didn't have a pornography station, I didn't see one. They didn't seem to have as many stations, total, as you would have on regular home TV with UHF. The selection of shows was not good, though I don't know how much to blame on the hotel and how much on the culture we live in. But I've been to other hotels where they do have one free station with old movies on it, and you'll see some you haven't seen.

Oh, one thing they did have that was pretty interesting, though they only had it from 6 PM to 12, was movies with Del Coronado content. For instance they had *The Stunt Man*, no, they didn't have *The Stunt Man* the day we were there, they were having it the next day. I would have loved to have seen that again, it's a very good movie, a classic that many people don't know about which they would not only enjoy but appreciate — it's not just a stunt movie, it's a movie about *people*. But instead they had *Time After Time*, was it *Time After Time*? Or *Once Upon a Time*? — I forget the title. I couldn't get into it, I kept confusing it with the other movie which may be called *Time Goes By*. But it had that guy with the jaw that played Superman, who pretends to be a good actor but he's really not, George Reeves, no, the later one — I met his ex-wife once, the one he had the children by. Gay Exton I think her name is. Now I don't know if they ever were actually married, but he was with her forever, then he dumped her, and now he's involved with someone he's going to marry, she's pregnant, she may even have had the baby by now — *Christopher* Reeves. Reeve. He's the star of this movie which was actually based on the Hotel del Coronado. Well, not based on it, but it took *place* at it in someone's imagination. In the book, not the movie. The movie was filmed somewhere else. I guess if you never saw it and you felt like sitting and watching it, at least it's a *movie*. Not made for TV. But that

was the only thing on which remotely, to my taste, was available to watch. The sports network, ESPN, I had some interest in catching a *glimpse* of once in a while, and there may have been takers for the basketball — and that's a positive thing— but it wasn't *my* preferred viewing.

I took the tour while we were there, ten dollars. It gave me more of a personal investment in the hotel. I especially liked the guide who gave it, it's not often you come across someone with all her lines drawn so boldly. She was very defined, she did not have too many contradictions that one could see. She looked exactly like who she was, which was the most old-fashioned whitebread type person I have seen in quite some time on many levels. But whitebread with caraway seeds. She was in that age range you might call between 55 and 65, probably over 60, extremely well groomed, somewhat stout but not fat, you know that round look with bubble hair — very, very brown and coiffed and rounded. She had an utterly appropriate suit on — “dressed up” for her morning tour. I *applaud* the fact that she took so much care about her grooming, it was part of who she was — she was herself down to a T. She talked about how the Duke of Windsor married Wallis Simpson, who started out as “just a little Navy wife — who would have known?” She seemed extremely proud of her own husband, who had been a Navy pilot, a captain — “the equivalent of a colonel in the Army.”

You could tell she got a lot of her identity from the hotel, to the point of where she referred to it as “she” and “her.” Which was unnerving to me—not just anthropomorphizing a building — it's almost psychotic to do that. I mean there are some people with psychological diseases who have trouble with pronouns, and when I heard that, even though the person was obviously not insane, it did disturb me. I just thought that maybe, while she had an interest and it was a good hobby for her, she might have been a *bit* obsessive about the place. It was hard to tell if she was more an employee or part of management, how closely she felt connected to which side, but as a job she did it with great enthusiasm. Every time we passed a service person, a maid or whatever, she would give a friendly good morning — this is a *good* day. It may have been part of the tour for her to communicate with the help that way — to show “we're all one happy family” — but in any case I think they responded well, just as I responded well, because she was so sincere. I am gullible to good advertising, but it has to be *good* advertising.

For instance, as I'm writing this, I just saw something very good on my TV. It's a car advertisement and it shows a kid's wagon rolling in front of the car and the car's stopping and it says SAFETY. Some people would probably think this is evil — “Kids aren't safe if you don't have this car” — but that isn't what I want to think they're saying. They're saying that if you're going to buy a car you can *trust* this car. And

that's what you buy anything for. It may be too automatic, but it's automatic for a reason, because it's an easy buck. But that doesn't make it a bad buck. If you were in a world without advertising, you wouldn't know *what* to do. You wouldn't know *what* to buy. Advertising in a way is a gift, and part of what I like about the Del Coronado is it says that it's good in a way that I'm willing to buy. But I think that if I just came across it, if we were driving down the street and then saw this big building, I would wonder what the building was, I would want to go look inside it. There is something intrinsically compelling and appealing about the outside of the building that draws you in. And once I was in, if I had the opportunity to stay there, which I did, I would definitely have a good time. The cover would make me like the book and, for the most part, the blurbs on the cover would make me like it even more.

Because when we took the tour and she was telling us about the ghost that lives there, and maybe even two, according to the story, that made our stay more interesting. I loved that part of it — the hotel's "legends." At one point I thought the ghost had stolen — or taken, we don't want to say that anyone had actually stolen — my hat. Never did I think that it might have been an employee. I either thought I misplaced it or the ghost came and took it. Because I honestly don't remember where I left it. Maybe at the check-in. But it turned out — oh! — this was so nice: someone turned it in to the lost and found! The woman there was so nice and took a very special care of looking for me. I didn't get to visit the actual lost and found, you call on the phone and say what you've lost and you describe it. I told her a brand new dark green woman's felt hat from The Gap. She said, "Didn't someone call before?" and I said, "Yes, my husband, but I really would like you to double-check," and she said, "Just one moment, please." She came back, put me on hold for several moments, someone else picked up, I said I'm still waiting, then she came back and asked me another question, finally she went back and *found* my hat! Then she said, "Where are you?" — I was at the phone in the lobby — she said, "Okay, I'll come to you. I was so appreciative I tried to give her a tip. I had a few dollars in my hand, and I said, "I don't know if this is appropriate, I don't want to insult you, but I'm very grateful." She said, "No, no." She wouldn't take it.

And you know, the fact that no one took my hat says something about the Del Coronado: that it was the kind of hotel where they do not keep your hat. Either the people who stay there or the people who run it. And I don't think it was because they seemed mostly Republican, because Republicans are as bad as anyone else. They must have had a feel for humanity, a sense of empathizing with those who lose things. It might be the way it-is if you're an actor or actress and you put on the costume of a thing, it makes you feel more like the *character* of the place, so in some ways going there feels a little like playing. "Pretend." So maybe the customers

go there with preconceptions of the place and behave themselves up to those preconceptions. One of the reasons I had such a good time is that while I did not have *specific* preconceptions I certainly had the preconception of a good time. And I joined in immediately, I had no trouble joining in. (Of course I would never take their hats.)

I think for the most part it was a safe place. We forgot to lock the car — I forgot, the passenger side — but no one took anything. Today I guess it's not that easy to find an environment where it feels separate from danger. The guests were very civilized. There weren't any "tough looking" people. I did eavesdrop on one conversation, a group of women whose husbands were with the convention. Subjects they talked about: their diets, exercising, their dogs, knitting. And their husbands, and their husbands' sports — whether they played cards, bridge or golf. It was very homogeneous the way each of them talked, there was a standard and everything was or wasn't a deviation from the standard. I wouldn't call them necessarily bland, or "squares," or "cardboard," but there was a certain rigidity, and a certain standardized look and behavior without any flash, even the golfers — but I did feel safe with them. There was a definite dullness to them — that's not a judgment, I'm trying to describe what these people *were*— I just thought they were the median. Median upper middle-class people, but working upper middle-class people. I don't think they were the squanderous rich, which was what the hotel and the tour were to some extent implying — all the Presidents and stars who've stayed there. I think these people worked hard for their money but had their money. And behaved in all the standard, civilized ways. They're used to all the normal celebrations, and never deviate that much.

But for all its civilizedness, and all its age and splendor — this thing of history — I guess what was missing was a *real* sense of tradition, of classic history. You know, like when you see these names — Barbizon Hotel, the Ritz, the Plaza — you think of these places and no matter how in or out of current fashion they may be, they still have a sense of tradition that is *deeply imbedded*, it's deeper than the contemporary people running them. And somehow, even though this hotel hypes that, and *is* that — I mean it's 105 years old — and tries to market and *adapt* to the concept of being traditional, you still don't feel the age of tradition. The weight of it and ease of it. The innate ease of it. Which didn't bother me, but I guess that's the substance that was missing.

The Turret and the Rock

- (*Lar Tusb is the only Pulitzer Prize winner to hail from Malm, Sweden.*)

Where I come from there is a saying: "You read what you write, you write what you read, an old hotel is like a book." Add magazines then you have the good idea. Reading quite much useful things before you go.

1. First I read *National Motorist*. March issue. Page 21. It said: "Hotel Del Coronado Tours. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Takes you through some of the guest rooms, special rooms, and up into the turret." The turret! The famous turret (let's see it). On Thursday. We walk up high the stairway...up the tall stairs...inside is redwood..."What is the machines?" "Surveillance equipment," said the woman. Also said: Thomas Edison discovered the lightbulb (then he put it in the Hotel). Also: ceiling of Crown Room is linseed oil. Why it shines. Every year (ten days) they oil it. On their backs, the scaffold, like Michelangelo!
2. *Visitor Magazine*. Jan./Feb./Mar. Page 8 is the topiary. In my country we don't have. Is so beautiful, the topiary. In black and white is beautiful. In green is beautiful. I prefer green. Thank you. Hotel! "The living sculpture is the brainchild of Del employee Wayne Buchta, the hazardous material manager in the engineering department of the hotel." Thanks, Mr. Wayne!

Then the recycle (page 10). Yes, I like the recycle. "Color-coded bins and boxes for collecting recyclables can be found all over the hotel, thus encouraging all Del employees to be aware of what can be recycled. When full, these containers are then emptied into larger bins, then the items are sorted and removed." Oh good goody! I see these bins. Am happy — about the encouraging.

Advertisement for Hotel Galleria Shops. Alexander Morgan — European Heritage: "North America's largest producer of European heraldry. Coats of arms, calligraphy, embroideries and monograms." Oh I will go. On the window more to read. "Family Name Histories covering over 200,000 names — England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Russia, and many other countries" — perhaps Sweden? — "The Perfect Gift." For my son Bjorgn — a coat of arms for his coat. Do you have — I ask — the Tusb crest? I have never ask before — don't even know if there is a one...I spell it out for him (the man). No. No gift!

1. *The Legend of Kate Morgan: The Search for the Ghost of the Hotel del Coronado* by Alan M. May. This time is a book. Is terrific. Could not put it down. I am interest — no, not the ghost — I don't like, don't like them — ooh I'm scared of! Only the room. Out side of room. Room number...check it up again...number 3312. Not scared of numbers and doors. (But a drink, first.) Put on my shoes. Old part of Hotel. Elevator to 3rd floor...I look...the number...the door. (No touching.) Is fun!
2. And last but never least to read *Rock on the Road: Where Working Hands Hole Up* (West Coast ed.) by Jon Morthland. It has all the places. Including the Hotel.

Rock bands that have stay at the Hotel: JoJo Gunne, Blind Faith, The Teddy Bears (three members), The Fall, Aerosmith, Kulture Slutz, Portnoy's Complaint, 1-2-3 Black Light, Hiisker Du (incognito). Motley Crie, The Slickaphonics, Wet Willie (reunion tour), Captain Beefheart, Faster Pussycat Kill Kill. (And many more.)

Bands that have not: Ice-T, Hackamore Brick, Lindsey Buckingham, Dion & The Belmonts, Bob Wills 8c His Texas Playboys, Bad Brains, The Contortions, Was (Not Was), The Streps, Folly, Sister Souljah, It's a Beautiful Day, Jan & Arnie, Dinosaur Jr., A Good Fuck.

Why do they stay — or not — is what I wonder. What appeals attract rock music? The players. I have never been a player, so I try and put myself in the shoes, what is the conclusion. Is it too quiet for them? Yes. Unless they bring the Walkman. (Cassettes.) Complimentary free mouthwash (so they taste good) — is that why? But many hotels have it. So nothing, really. Unless you count the pool: that's what it is. And the sea.

All the good reading! Good bye.

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[Best Of](#)

Hey, Mr. DeeJay, what's that powder on your face?

I asked them to give me an earlier slot, and finally I got it.

Author

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Steely Dan – from Greatest Hits album cover.

In 1980 I still had this punk-rock show, “Hepcats from Hell,” KPFK, L.A., “listener supported radio,” I was a volunteer. I’d been doing it about a year, 2:00 to 6:00 a.m., Saturday night, whatever you call it, into Sunday. By now I hated it. At first I loved it. It was my second or third or fourth wind with rock and roll, although actually, the only reason I was doing it, why I felt a connection to punk-rock, is –I didn’t think of punk-rock as rock— it was something different. A different animal. It wasn’t long, however, before it reversed its field and became the same animal, the same marketplace, same audience, or a subset of the same basic audience — before the killer stakes of profit, celebrity, and boogie-till-you-puke superseded those of, um, expression, creation, “art,” “fun,” whatever you wanna call it. By 1981 it was all over. And I unplugged from punk, and from rock, and I’ve never looked back.

But in ‘80 I was tired of just the show. The hours were killing me, it threw off my whole week. I wasn’t the same till about Wednesday. I was sick of even the hangovers from the less than a six-pack per show I would normally ingest. I was 35 years old, older than any of my guests, who would show up after gigs with full youthful heads o’ steam — I had trouble keeping up with them. The show itself was great, the people and the music, the “experiences” — John Doe dancing Exene around the room while I played “Waltz Across Texas”; Johnny Rotten, in town to promote the first Public Image tour (and doing my show, not my rival — L.A.’s only other punk DJ — Rodney Bingenheimer’s), saying on mike, “Hey, Mr. DeeJay, what’s that powder on your face” (somebody had given me a hit of crystal meth); letting a

total stranger play drums over the phone along with Nervous Gender live in the studio — it was enduring it that was getting tough.

I asked them to give me an earlier slot, and finally I got it. This guy who did the show before me, “Tesseract” (a four-dimensional rectangle or something), an “experimental music” show, was leaving. Midnight to 2:00, oh boy, great. Would I mind taking over his show for one week, its last week, before doing my own — a six-hour haul — then the slot was mine? No problem.

So I bring along my usual stack of stuff, new records each week, I never liked playing anything twice. A massive assortment of all kinds of shit — not just punk (per se) but Sun Ra, the blues, dub, sound effects records, beat poetry, bird calls — everything except mainstream rock. I figure I can play his show like I’d play my own: entire sides of Throbbing Gristle (industrial noise) and Leo Smith (minimalist trumpet burlblings), then I hand-cranked the first side of *A Love Supreme* (my least favorite late Coltrane) backwards.

Toward the end of the two hours — what the hey — I put on something from my waning days on the rockwrite dole, ’75, ’76, back when I was still plugged into the food tube of the record industry, anyway still on mailing lists, *Royal Scam* by Steely Dan, which I’d saved for one cut: “Don’t Take Me Alive.” Good lyrics I thought, from the p.o.v. of this cornered rat, a cocky bozo about to be nailed by the cops, reminded me of, I dunno, *High Sierra* or *The Killing*, *Asphalt Jungle*. “Agents of the law, luckless, pedestrian / I know you’re out there, with rage in your eyes and your megaphones.” Some later line about “the lies and the laughter” and another about “the mechanized hum of another world.” Basically just benign rockroll, fuzz guitar, nothing especially quirky or unusual, I mean I wasn’t listening to the shit anymore, the genre, but this was a cut I did once like, harmless.

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Then I get these calls. First, while it’s still “Tesseract,” some woman phones, one of that show’s seven or eight faithful listeners, why am I playing such crap? I’m kind, I don’t even tell her that next week the slot will be mine, ha, just said, well, it didn’t kill you, did it? Then during my own show, just after it officially starts, I’m playing some cuts and one of my listeners calls, same deal. Why had I played it? My listeners I often just insulted outright — part of the territory — punk territory — so this one I simply told fuck off, Jack.

Ten minutes later my guest arrives, John Cale, never my favorite member of the Velvet Underground, always struck me as a method actor, ugh, though some people

thought of him as a progenitor of punk. Depends on how you define punk, right? (To me punk was Mark Smith of the Fall or Darby Crash, who wasn't dead yet.) Even older than me.

From word one he comes on all commie-baiting — Afghanistan or some such, Cuba — “Soon there'll be only one flavor, and that flavor will be cherry red.” Fuck you, man (what a wheezy act). After a while I played records simultaneous with him talking, at equal volume or louder (the monitor was off so he never knew). One of the things I later played — natch — was “Don't Take Me Alive,” and before it was even over I got another bullshit call, why am I playing...oh, shut up.

A fucking auspicious change of time slots. I'm dead tired, drinking too much just to ignore Cale, or sidestep him, and he gives me a copy of his latest LP, the one with the A-bomb cloud on the cover — how hip — which I sold that week, no, traded it for more shit to play on the show, which lasted another six months before they threw me off for saying fuck-shit-piss on the air without reading the Sensitive Language Disclaimer. FUCK 'EM ALL.

Yes, I always took it so personal, so serious, so my-ass-on-a-mission, though I didn't even use words like “mission,” not then, but still I had the inclination. Right, whoops, ME again — Gay Talese I'm not. It's hard being just an observer. New Journalism — remember that one? — sure took a heap o' lying, y'know to write much of anything, anything “objective,” to lie yourself a story — just a story — by lying yourself out of it. It can be done, I've done it; lemme try and lie you one now. Stephen Stills. The Sting of his time: fatuous, self-satisfied whitebread (or cardboard). Montreal, '74, August. I was there, but I'm not in it. His wife is, though.

Veronique Sanson, this French person, French Europe not French Canada, they were married at the time. Both were in town for a performance, hers, a superstar import chantoozy; marriage means travel (for stars). It also means, if you're Stephen, both parties parlez in English — tout le temps. His rule, he's got bigger bucks —not to mention a bigger duck, er, dick — and at the school he attended, i.e., the old one, a man's dick was still his castle. She wants French, does she, well she'll just hafta phone her ma. Months and months of which — the pressure builds — and here they are in (pronounce it right) Kaybek. French being kind of SPOKE here, it is inevitable the dam will break. As her contracted backup group, the Ville Emard Blues Band, the 17-piece (no lie) “Grateful Dead of Quebec,” tends like many/most here to regard English as its back-burner tongue at best — a sick remnant of limey imperialism — 'tain't a minute before she's Frenching like a Frenchman, linguistically speaking. After

which hubby — shaking, quaking, fire in his eye — stomps over to bass player Bill Gagnon, grabs his shirt, tells him (loud enough for all the Province to hear): “Don’t you ever speak in French to my wife again!!!”

Loads o’ laughs — that’s part one. The Sting of his time was real far out. He then goes and hires, no, that’s the punchline, he’s seen everywhere at show time, backstage, onstage, in the wings...anywhere where French and the missus run the risk of extroprofessionally intersecting. Singing it, fine, ’s one of those occupational givens. Unfortunate perhaps, and since we’re on the Good side of the Atlantic a tad shameful, but the locals, many thousand turned-on happyfolk, the fucks, are actually buying this shit — mother-tonguish ooh la la Vamour— so chalk one up to anti-imperialism. Or something; anyway he’ll survive. Meantime he’s nervous and hovering. You can’t look left, right or take a piss without noticing the creep in his Cleveland Browns (22) jersey like off the cover of the Stills LP. Finally it’s over, the set, the show, there’s a party. At which appear not one but two Stephen Stillses!! Like he’d hired some guy, or enlisted, a look-alike/dress-alike so four eyes could do double the spywork of two! What a dork! (They are no longer hitched.)

“The Great Lie,” two versions.

(1) Wardell Gray, recorded in Hollywood, 11/23/46 (three months before the “Relaxin’ at Camarillo” session with Charlie Parker), originally released as “Parts 1 & 2” — two sides of a 78. Of all the black first-line tenor players descended from both Lester Young and early bop, Wardell had the most decided bias for Lester: lightness of tone (as opposed to what so many white guys borrowed: the tone itself), roundness of form, easy flow, fluent lyricism. A little darker-sounding than Lester, but not really by way of Coleman Hawkins/Chu Berry, not directly — more like he might’ve picked it up from (let’s say) Don Byas.

An R&B-ish intro, some R&B swells and runs — this at a time when the swing era was still in the process of birthing both R&B (with major contributions from, again, Lester) and bop — a dandy solo. Some nice piano by the undersung Dodo Marmarosa (ten months after his own work with Parker on “Moose the Mooch,” “Yardbird Suite,” and “Ornithology”), who shared with Thelonious Monk a proclivity for stride-ish left-hand patterns (but otherwise sounds nothing like him).

(2) The Woody Herman recording of 7/21/49 is pretty tepid in comparison. By then the Second Herd was “down to the dregs, with only Jimmy Giuffre left from the Four Brothers (speaking of Lester players). Vibes solo by Terry Gibbs, clarinet by Woody

(ho hum), trombone by possibly Earl Swope (doesn't sound like Bill Harris), tenor by probably Gene Ammons (who had replaced Stan Getz, and could very well have sounded this way then, before his tone got big as a house, though the last few notes are on the light side) — the CD discography is not very useful. Hollywood? It doesn't say. Shorty Rogers, arranger? Dunno. I'm probably supposed to know these things.

Sounds like the tune is based on the chords of "Just You, Just Me," from which Monk later derived "Evidence," although maybe (as a tune) it predates it.

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Best Of

Meltzer family Christmas beer bust

Author

Richard Meltzer

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Feature Stories



I really do think the aluminum version of Tecate is better than the old steel version, which had that acridness.

Ah! those darkish wintry days La 4J of yeah yeah oh yeah! the Yorkshire pudding! the stuffing & sweet tater! tuna en casserole! corn niblets w / margarine! goosenberry Pop-Tarts! hot steamy mugs of hot buttered port! a bird! a bird! plucked of earthly feathers and roasted, its liver and gizzard braised in raisins and cel'ry, chestnuts and secret ingredes! decaf and kiwi fruit sherbet! pretzels and sherry! a feed! a feast! on dotted lines of holiday festivacy and etc!

[illegible]

Hate to seem like Sea World, but as always there's a "theme" to our beering. Last year it was Belgian beer; the year before, New Zealand.

In 1958 (what a year!): the ales and stouts of Connecticut, all of which went belly up in the serial brewery fires (arsonist still at large) of May to Aug. '63. This year, by popular vote, the honor falls to the fine export brews of Mexico.

From here, from there, from everywhere they come: Meltzers. My half-brother Unc from Saginaw. Sister Woonah from Tarp, PA. Sonsdaughters E.Z., Aphida, Zane and Pluz from Duluth, Dubuque, Sioux City and New York, New York — the fabled Apple! — with spouses LuAnne, Ju-Boy, Osco and Beets. Grandchildren Ulf, Johann, Sess, Fuffy, VulVo, Porcelain and Groucha. Niece-nephews Bix, Beph, Jordano, Salada (the family “slut”), Uha, Digby and Pants. Cousins Bib, Peony, Theck, Beluga, Toetoe (a great plumber), Calico and Thubb. Plus assorted in-laws and shit.

And for the first time as a member in good standing—from out of the shadows! — now that my dear wife Cora has gone to her, ahem, reward: my longtime mistress Actress Irene Forrest. (Had to sneak her in — as “maid” — until this year.)

Not present: grandson Upto, whose dad last month shot my least favorite daughter, Eff, along with siblings Wug, Seabase, Buzzbo and Floonce. Upto, off at med school (the Univ. of Oslo), is to be excused for “avoiding family” this yuletide, but he did send his best: “Have one on me.” We will, Upto, we will.

“Meltzer,” by the by, is Middle Norwegian for consumer and ingester of bottled lager or pilsener product— we didn’t ask for it, none of us did. It is simply our Heritage, however these things happen, and precedes us, so to speak. (Did you know that “Clinton” is Olde English for he who farts in theatres during the wet season?) Okay!!

Okay: the presentation of the Categories. To be followed, in short order or long, by Research and Report. We Meltzers don't just drink our beer — we live it. Or try to. (To the best of our 'bilities.) Zane, Ju-Boy and Thubb of this year's Categories

Committee — they've been at this for weeks — have got the list for us. Okay, fellas, present 'em.

Presented:

1. **Beer for watching sports.** We get this every year, it's gotten old. At least this time Fuffy has brought along his cache of sumo tapes. "Akebono versus Wakanohana, Kyushu Basho — a honey of a match." Swell. So grab a couple 6-packs, take Sess and Porcelain out to the tool shed. (TV does not belong in a house.)

1. **Beer for cooking.** That's a new one; any takers? How 'bout Aphida (formerly married to James Beard)? Uha (enrolled at the Food Inst, of Del Mar)? Great, great...here's a 6 of Negra Modelo...see what youse two can dish up.

2. **Beer for family fun.** Whatever in hell that is. Hey, I'm only the patriarch here. Nobody wants to tackle this? Good — let's drop it.

4.**Beer for driving.** A natural. We'll all try our hand at it in due time, I reckon.

5.**Beer for sobriety.** Talk about fads! A good idea tho: weed out those beers so bad you won't wanna drink 'em. A battery of Cousins led by Beluga quickly determines NONE APPLY.

1. **Beer for reading.** "Me me me!" shout LuAnne and Vulvo, who disappear into upstairs bedrooms with *War and Peace*, *The Soft Machine* and sixers of Chihuahua and Superior.

2. **Beer for writing.** Anyone for prose? Poetry? Pants swaggers forward, chugs a Dos Equis, tosses off a free-associational gem:

Corn hops malt barley rice wheat sand

molasses buttermilk blood bran flan flying

down to Rio

Rio by the sea-o;

in my hand is an axe

and I axe you once, twice:

"Who is Doggy Julian?"

Excellent!

1. **Beer for cardmaking.** Make that beer and cardmaking — beer theme Xmas cards— and let's give it to little Johann, still too young to personally partake of the stuff (our cutoff age this year is 7-1/2).

9. **Beer for ideas.** I'll take that myself. A slug, two slugs—three four five—of Noche Bueno and I'm set...here 'tis. The solution to all the world's ills, the first big giant step anyway, is to limit all TV commercials to a thousand dollars total production expense — strictly enforced. So nobody can sell you nothing you don't want, don't need, and "consumption" would not seem in and of itself so appealing. Nothing, not Cadillac, not Nike, not Diet Coke, would look ? any better than dogpoop at 4 AM on UHF — "Buy or rent a multipurpose folding ladder" — or the Home Shopping Network. A thousand bucks including actors, script, camera work, transportation, everything. It's a felony if you go over (9 yrs. in federal pen).

1. **Beer for beer sake.** A/k/a beer for drinking. Perhaps the most important of Categories. So important that we record all pertinent activities — the comparison tests, the Research, the analyzations and testimonials — dialogue a la Meltz — for multiple days if nec. ("the 7 days of Xmas" — or as long as the beer holds out). To be made available to bonafide beer societies FREE OF CHARGE. Beer inquiry at its very best — leave it to the Meltzers.

To the sofa by the tree! — get those camcorders rollin' — let's drink!!

DOS EQUIS, DOS EQ-UIS SPECIAL LAGER

OSCO: Having had a Dos Equis Special Lager and a regular in not too many minutes, I feel like they both must go down pretty easy.

PLUZ: Actually, though, they've gotten to be almost the same beer. I remember that when I was first drinking Dos Equis it used to be a bitter, dark beer. And there wasn't any of this pale lager stuff. And now they're almost the same, I don't even know why they have them in a brown and a green bottle — they're the same beer now.

O: Fuck 'em.

CORONA

O: Corona is smooth, as always.

P: Well, it's consistent these days. 'Cause I remember when Corona was first imported, you could get good Corona and bad Corona. Now they make so much of it it's all mediocre Corona. Corona is Mexican Budweiser.

O: I think if you drink Corona after something else, like the way there's something maybe, well, not exactly caustic about the taste even though it's smooth, you don't pick that up when you're drinking it after something else. 'Cause you already have an approximation of that taste in your mouth from the other beers.

P: The alleged piss taste.

O: So it's like a very smooth follow-up to heavier Mexican beers.

P: Not that Dos Equis is really heavy anymore.

CARTA BLANCA

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P: I find it so far the most satisfying we've had.

O: It has its own being, its own essence. It has a kind of low-key light kind of sensibility that isn't vis-a-vis anything else, it's unto itself.

P: It's a fullness, and it has a little point at the end of the taste, a kind of very quick finish, a quick decay.

O: It has a sweetness that doesn't make you sick. I mean compared to any of the lightish beers in the world, it's one of the good ones.

P: Yeah. It's one I will often order in a restaurant when I just want, y'know, I don't wanna be surprised, I just want solid beer.

O: In 1972, I was in L.A. to write a story on Jackson Browne for *Rolling Stone*, and I ended up at Lucy's El Adobe with him and Warren Zevon, and they ordered Carta Blancas and I ordered a Dos Equis. And they looked at me funny — "Why don't you try one of these?" No thanks. And I was just happy I could pronounce Dos Equis and order it, y'know, but "Oh, you'll be sorry."

P: When the Damned first came to Los Angeles Slash wrote about them, they went up to their hotel room and interviewed them. And it was very properly transliterated

so that you got, like they're sitting in bed drinking beers and Kickboy is talking to them and Dave Vanian or somebody says, "Oh — that — that DOSS ECKWISS — that's proper piss." And from then on I've always thought of "proper piss" when I've thought of Dos Equis, because I never knew whether in an English context that meant the beer was good or bad.

TECATE/CAN

P: Unlike some people, I really do think the aluminum version of Tecate is better than the old steel version, which had that acridness, although there was a nice solidity to the can that made it almost seem like putting the lime on top was a good idea, but to me that was just an attempt to disguise the fact that the beer really tasted crappy. And I think they must've changed the beer too, because this beer is not bad.

O: It doesn't taste as corrosive.

P: No, and that's what comes from the can, I think, to a large extent.

O: Aluminum is supposed to be one of the causes of Alzheimer's — so why not get it from beer?

P: I feel I'm getting all kinds of different things from beer — and grateful for them.

TECATE/BOTTLE

O: Tecate in the bottle tastes more intense.

P: Intense is relative. I think it tastes sudsier in the bottle, and smoother. I think I could drink more of it.

O: When I say the bottle seems more intense, there's something nonmetallically intense that doesn't seem to be a function of suds, but the liquid itself seems to have more bite to it, somehow.

P: See, I get the exact opposite impression. I get more bite from the canned version, and just a more pleasant aftertaste from the bottle.

O: Well, okay, here's what I would say. That Tecate in the can has aftertaste as primary taste. I mean you're already tasting something unwelcome immediately.

P: And then it hangs on. But you get more complexity from the bottled version. Probably because it's not masked by the, uh — now I can't remember which one I had first.

O: When I say more intense, I think it functions as beer without any of the taste shit in the way of its beerness.

P: It has more body.

O: Okay.

P: Just like a blow to the body from a medium-range puncher with short arms. If he can get close enough to you that he can make you feel it.

O: Rocky Marciano with the bottle, Rocky Graziano with the can.

BOHEMIA

P: I think Bohemia is a damn good finishing beer, because it cuts through, it has an edge, it has a little bitterness, it has substantial body. I've sometimes ordered it with a meal, but it's wasted on a meal, really. Bohemia is good for like a small cup of something, because it has a lot of variety, complexity, bite and stuff like that. It's good for one bottle by itself, I don't think you should buy a six-pack of Bohemia. I think you should drink it one bottle at a time. That's not to say it's better or worse as a utilitarian beer — Carta Blanca is better. With a meal of medium to large size, I would say don't go to a second bottle of Bohemia. As a matter of fact, I would say Carta Blanca or Corona for your first beer while you're eating, and as a second beer after you're just about through have a Bohemia to round things out.

SOL

JORDANO: There's a kind of lemony afterburst, or afterburp — afterbirth? And today it's clear, but not always. I've sometimes had it and found it to have universes of debris in it. Or at least solar systems.

THECK: Well, isn't the sun the source of all matter?

J: There are other puns I guess, but who's got time? I'd say as a beer it's okay, a B-minus. Could be a lot better, and also a lot worse. It doesn't stack up against Dos Equis, which has a fuller taste, but they brew this too, so I guess they have a

different clientele in mind. I know beeroholics who swear by it. It does seem less toxic than it used to be, or used to seem.

T: To me it's a better lightish beer than a lot of 'em. I'm observing this while we're drinking it by itself, though. I don't know how it would fare in a head-to-head with Corona, say, or Carta Blanca.

J: What I'd like to see is a list of ingredients. You know the biggest lobby currently in Washington is the one whose job it is to keep ingredients off the beer labels. They've done a pretty good job, wouldn't you say? Imagine if ice cream or canned mushroom soup were exempt from having to list it.

T: I think it tastes a little leathery, y'know somewhere towards the back of the mouth.

J: You mean like a shoe?

T: No, lighter than that. Like a tan car coat, say, as opposed to a black or a brown motorcycle jacket. And if it's shoes, more like soft deerskin. Or a glove. I wonder if it's any of the same chemicals as tanning.

CORONA LIGHT

WOONA (sips, spits out): Junk. Ugh. Absolute junk.

E.Z.: How is it junk?

W: Awful. Junk is awful. Terrible. It's lingering on my tongue.

E: But what's the actual taste?

W: I don't know. A total waste. Is that what beer tastes like?

E: How does it smell?

W: I can't even smell it. It has no smell.

E: Unc, what would you say?

Unc (sniffing — can't drink — he's got the Parkinson's): No! No! (He cries uncontrollably.)

CORONA (12 OZ.), CORONITA (7 OZ.)

VULVO: Well, they both look the same.

GROUCHA: Smell the same.

V: Same fast-dispersing head.

G: But do they taste the same?

V: They sort of do, but do they do?

G: They continue to, but as I continue drinking from the glass they seem to now look different in the bottle. Although it could just be the amount of blue in the label of the larger one, the Corona, makes the beer look darker.

V: And you know? Corona really seems to taste less delicious and delightful than it used to taste.

G: A more noticeable bitter element?

V: Biting as opposed to a bite?

G: Maybe they should bring back the piss. Only kidding.

V: Oh, it's fine — what the hey.

NEXT MORNING, WARM

V: Great, just great.

G: Goes down easy easy easy.

V: The elixir of the gods — as it were.

TECATE LIGHT

BIX: It sort of has nothing.

BIB: Tastes like good American bad beer.

BIX: It tastes less like beer than any other light beer I've had, including Coors Light.

BIB: You know, this is actually the first light

beer I've had. Whenever I see "low calorie," "no cholesterol," "light," I'm like Goebbels when he hears the word "culture" — I reach for my gun, I run in the opposite direction. So this is my first experience, and it's certainly not as good as Heineken, which isn't the worst thing, probably, to not be.

BEPH: I don't think it's completely terrible for light beer, but it's one of those — it just tastes like a generic, modern, synthetic, imitation beer. They should call it imitation beer food.

BIB: Beerlike beverage.

BEPH: Beer with plastic overtones in the aftertaste.

BIX: The aftertaste of it is not beerlike.

BEPH: Exactly. And the head is a total giveaway, right, that it's gonna be one of those fake beers.

'Cause it's got billions of very uniform-sized, tiny, y'know, like injected bubbles.

Not like bubbles that occur naturally in real beer.

BIX: You

wouldn't wanna call it suds.

SALADA: It tastes like flat beer. From the bottle, already flat. Got some salt? (Adds salt.) Now that's a head. (Drinks.) Tastes like salty flat beer! Like if you're at the beach, in the ocean, and it gets in the can. But it would have to be sitting out there a long time first to get this flat.

PACIFICO CLARA

BIB: I think it's, well, okay — I don't know if it's light, I don't know if it's unlight, I have no idea — but it's not as bad as Tecate Light. Should it be?

BIX: How could it be? (Shows him label.)

BIB: So I was right — it's a decent beer.

BEPH: The bubbles are not all the same size, so this is probably in the vat for a week and not a day. (Drinks.) That's beer — I could drink that. It's, well, it's very thin. It's almost beer. A sincere attempt at a Heineken or a Becks style beer that's only okay — it's drinkable. It would be moderately thirst-quenching. It's not offensive. And I do like the label, the little red mountain and the lightning bolt with the anchor — I assume these are beer ingredients behind the life preserver. I'm not sure what the origin — a German sailor might've been involved with the company a long time ago.

NEGRA MODELO

DIGBY: The first sip tastes like a dark beer. Now it just tastes like beer. It isn't that dark. ZANE: They call it dark ale.

D: It isn't anything like a dark ale. It's a pretty light dark beer.

LUANNE: It evaporates faster than most dark beers. The taste doesn't linger, doesn't have the heaviness or the lingering flavorness of dark. It has a little bit of bite to start with, and then the flavor just evaporates — you forget about it.

Z: Yeah. Having sipped it for the last half-hour, from one moment to the next I can't remember it. It passes very quickly — like a marijuana time-distortion thing. Where'd it go?

L: I get the impression that you wouldn't intentionally choose to stay with it through time, you'd just move on to the next kind of beer — something you could build a relationship with.

Z: You could drink it by the shot.

L: The shot would be good. In terms of head, though, it's a typical dark beer. It's Guinness-like in the quick disappearance of head.

D: On second thought, it tastes like tomato juice.

UHA & APHIDA'S NEGRA MODELO BLACK BEAN SOUP

1/2 lb. black beans, soaked overnight

4 tbs. olive oil

1/3 cup chopped red onion

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped

4 or 5 Italian plum tomatoes, peeled,
seeded, chopped

2 or 3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tsp. ground cumin

1 tsp. pasilla chili powder

1/4 – 1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper

1 bottle Negra Modelo

2 qts. water or chicken stock

2 tbs. minced cilantro

salt to taste

Saute onions, jalapeno pepper and garlic for a minute or two in oil. Add chili powder, cumin and cayenne, and saute for another few seconds (don't burn spices). Add tomatoes and mash them into the mixture. Cook another minute or two. Add beer and stock and bring to a boil. Drain beans and add them to pot. Add 1 tb. of cilantro (reserve other tb. for garnish). Cook at a low boil for as long as it takes for beans to get tender. Time will vary from 1 -1/2 to 3 hours depending on the beans. Remove 1 cup of tender beans and run them through a food processor together with some liquid from the pot. Return the puree to pot and blend (this gives some body to the

soup). Taste for seasoning (don't add salt until end of cooking process or beans will be tough). Garnish with cilantro and more red onion, tomato and/or avocado if desired. Serves 4-6.

PACIFICO CLARA, CARTA BLANCA

RICHARD (myself): You seem to prefer Pacifico Clara to Carta Blanca. Why is that?

ACTRESS IRENE FORREST: I have a feeling that it was a predetermined prejudice. First of all, it has a better label, it's got yellow and red — it's nice. It feels more foreign, it looks more exotic. And look at the curvature of the bottle — everything about it is more appealing. But I don't mind Carta Blanca, I don't mind it at all — I think it's just ordinary 'cause I have it all the time. Can I tell you the truth? I forget what they both taste like. Let me taste the Pacifico again...mmm. It's very satisfying. It has that good wheaty taste. Or peaty I think they call it. Let me taste the other one...I still prefer Pacifico. It has a much more pungent smack. Carta Blanca is fine — if push came to shove, I could drink either. You know what...mmm...the Carta Blanca's sweeter. I tend to like sweet, but I'd still go with Pacifico — it's more tangy. The truth is, I get very affected by beer, so after a while it doesn't matter what they taste like. That's a side of beer, don't you think, how it affects you? If your body can respond to it without too much trouble, I think that's quite good.

BOTH BEERS MIXED IN ONE GLASS

I: It's not a good idea to mix them, you never know what the chemical reaction of one beer on the other might be. But drinking the mixture this time seems fine. It's not as good as each beer singly — it does dilute the taste. But it is okay. And the fizzy effect of — burpy — or some would call it belching — I was just thinking, because / don't make those horrible sounds, but I do have that sense of it coming back up through my throat.

That's one of the things I like about beer, is when you're sitting there and then it comes back, and you get to have it again without drinking it. I also like the smell of beer when you throw it out in the sink — perhaps you fell asleep and you didn't finish the bottle, so in the morning you throw it down the drain.

CHIHUAHUA VS. CARTA BLANCA

I: I like the Chihuahua better, which you would never imagine — liking a beer named Chihuahua. I don't like scrawny little silly, stupid dogs particularly. I don't know if

they're stupid, but they're not appealing. But I like it, it actually seems to have a little more bite to it — as a dog should, ha — a little more flair.

R: I think they're almost indistinguishable. Chihuahua is less sweet. There's a little more sweetness to the Carta Blanca.

I: You know what? I was passing by and I smelled the Chihuahua and it gave me a very good feeling. Carta Blanca doesn't have as pungent a smell. I'll taste it again...you know something? Now the Carta Blanca is having more of a ting or something.

R: A tang?

I: A tingle. So I guess once you've had enough of each it doesn't matter. I wish we were drinking wine instead of beer.

BOHEMIA VS. TECATE

I: Bohemia looks darker, Tecate looks greener. But that might be because there's a colored napkin behind it. I'll taste the Bohemia...yum yum...it's excellent. Tecate...well...the Tecate is sweeter. Bohemia is more bitter.

R: I just think Tecate tastes like wishy washy beer. Bohemia just has more range of taste.

I: Let me taste them both again...okay. The Bohemia is beer, the Tecate is nothing. It's just very light, it's good enough but it's not really beer. It's like a light tea, a beer tea. You put water in the leaves and then you get kind of a hint of the flavor — that's what this is. It's watery.

R: And Bohemia is like coffee?

I: Bohemia has a pungent, more of, it's good, it's stronger.

R: Have you had too much to drink?

I: Well, isn't that the way to ascertain if beer is any good? The buzz, right? I think the buzz comes from the Bohemia, not the Tecate.

MODELO ESPECIAL VS. TECATE

R: Which looks darker to you?

I: Modelo Especial. I like to say it. With a name like that, it must be special. By the way, who's going to wash all the glasses? 'Cause I won't do it. As opposed to drinking out of paper cups. Okay, I'll taste each one...mmm...yes. Unfortunately, you can never, it's not fair. Because I drank the Modelo Especial first, and I think your first taste of beer — if you haven't had beer in many hours — is always better. It's always the best taste. And I tasted the Tecate second, and it tasted second best.

R: Here's what you do — rinse your mouth with...

I: No, it's not a question of rinsing. It's a question of the enjoyment of, no, I've already been polluted. And I like it better anyway. I think it's a much more full taste, and I was drinking it like a thirsty tree. Y'know, a tree that's thirsty for liquid.

R: Why don't you drink some Tecate with the approximate thirst to see how you feel about it?

I: Okay...it's too thin. It doesn't have as thick a taste. I do like a thicker beer.

R: Why don't you just stir some honey in with it?

I: No, you drink it as it comes.

R: How is drinking Tecate after eating pizza? Is it good with food?

I: It's excellent. I must say one thing for beer, whether it's Tecate or another beer or what. It quenches your thirst. Which is a good thing to have as a property for a drink. And the Tecate, I think 'cause it's thin, does quench your thirst very well.

R: There's no such thing as a thick beer.

I: Yes there is. If you took a poll you'd see.

R: To me these beers are almost identical. There's a little more body to the Modelo, but by body I don't mean it's thicker, I mean it's got more structure to it.

I: There's more weight to it.

R: Well, whatever you wanna say.

I: I think there's more difference between Modelo and Tecate than between Bohemia and Tecate. Those, they're more subtle. These I think are very much different.

R: I disagree. I think Bohemia is very-much different from Tecate, and Modelo is not very different.

I: What makes you an authority?

R: So why do you think there's more difference here?

I: They taste different. I would say Modelo is a testy beer — which Tecate is not. It has a very satisfying taste, in fact I would like some more...mmm. I don't know how to describe it, but it's more smooth without being inconsequential. Possibly it's the best Mexican beer.

R: I would compare 'em to different whiskeys. Modelo is a single-malt Scotch, Tecate is blended Scotch.

BLINDFOLD TEST

I: Well, I was sure the first was Tecate, so obviously the other would have to be Modelo. But when I tasted it, the supposed Modelo, I couldn't tell at all which was which. They tasted exactly the same, no, maybe the second one was Modelo. Because it did have a bit of a tangier — but maybe it activated the pepper from the pizza.

R: So why'd you think the first was Tecate?

I: When I drank it, it went down without much ceremony. It didn't make a big deal on the way down the way some beers, they have more of a hello taste. And the first beer did not say hello. The second did, but not as much as I thought it might. I'm not saying I overrated it, but the difference is more subtle than one would have expected — from my initial response.

R: Well, Irene, the first was Tecate, the second Modelo — unless I confused them.

I: No, I think that's correct. But it's not as much of a difference as one would have thought.

BOHEMIA VS. MODELO ESPECIAL

I: Well, I'm not much of a connoisseur, but the second one is better.

R: The second one is better? Usually you tell me the first one is better.

I: You must've switched it.

R: No I didn't. The first is Bohemia and the second is Modelo.

I: I won't necessarily call it better, but it's a sharper taste.

R: First you said it was better, now it's only sharper?

I: Well, just in terms of the excitement factor. I'm saying there was definitely a resounding result.

R: Resounding result?

I: I mean there was like a bite. It did stuff to you. Just tastewise, whereas the other one was bland.

R: I like the Bohemia better. I think it's got a more, uh, complete range of taste, an organized medley of taste — whereas the Modelo seems like about two or three different tastes in different directions.

I: Well, the directions don't bother me.

R: The Modelo does taste good, but it's sort of more like an American beer — like Miller or something, Ballantine, y'know, an East Coast beer. Schmidt's. Rheingold.

I: No, I think it's much more, uh, I wanna say it's got more of an edge than those beers. It's more, it's like they tried harder or something.

R: I think somebody dropped a rubber band in, it tastes like a rubber band.

R: So Dos Equis is not as good as Modelo. What about Dos Equis Special Lager? It's dishwater?

I: No, it's fine, there's nothing wrong with it. I wouldn't say it's crummy.

R: Is it better than Tecate?

I: Probably Tecate is better. It has a nicer sound to it.

R: So in other words you're saying you don't know what Dos Equis Special Lager is better than, but you're saying it's fine.

I: I'm saying it's fine. It's not terrible. I have no memory for beer. If this were chocolate, I could tell you. I don't know if you wanna know this, Richard, but none of these beers compare to English beers.

R: But how 'bout compared to U.S. beers?

I: Probably they're better than U.S. beers. All of them are. But I suspect with beers it has more to do with what you were doing than what you were drinking at the time that makes it memorable. Like, is it a special evening?

R: Excuse me, Irene. First you tell me that Modelo is memorable. Now you're telling me...

I: I don't remember the taste of it — I just suspect that it's better than these. Just from the idea of it.

R: What's the idea of Modelo?

I: It just was exciting — I'd never heard of it before. It's based on that. Can I tell you the truth, Richard? If you wanna get down to it, there's really just two kinds of Mexican beers. There's the kind that tastes a little bit more bitter, a little more hearty. And then there's the kind that goes down more easily and has less taste. And they all seem to belong to one of the two categories. And of these two, the Dos Equis is more bitter, and the Dos Equis Special Lager is the easier one.

...VS. CARTA BLANCA

I: You know something, I think this is the best one. Unfortunately. 'Cause it's just an ordinary beer. I mean you see it around all the time. And I've had more to drink, so I don't know if...

R: Compare it to the Dos Equis Special Lager.

I: No need. The Special Lager is just nothing. It has much less of a bite, though I wouldn't quite call it bland. But you know what? Before we go on, I just must tell you that this is THREE GLASSES that have to be washed tonight! As opposed to two, which I could accept.

R: Okay, compare the Carta Blanca to Dos' Equis regular.

I: Mmm...very good...Carta Blanca's the best. I would stand behind Carta Blanca. It's the first one that's given me any sense of, you know, where I have conviction about it. Its taste is very good — it's round. It's got a very round combination of tart and sweet. But I just feel compelled to comment on the ludicrousness of putting words to an experience that's purely sensual or sensorial — or nourishment that's only, or biological satiation — and to put...y'know, part of this is just stupid. To have to put detailed kind of poetry and analytical descriptions to something that's primal is in a way a distraction.

R: So would you sit around sipping Carta Blanca all afternoon?

I: Okay, that's a more valid question. Of these three, I guess I would pick Carta Blanca.

R: You'd drink it all afternoon?

I: Well, that would be nice.

R: And how about Modelo?

I: I don't remember Modelo. I just remember that I liked it.

R: So you've now put it completely out of your mind. And half an hour ago you told me Modelo was the best.

I: But I didn't remember it when I said that.

R: Nor do you prob'ly remember you said Carta Blanca was ordinary.

I: Did I say that? Well this time it's just wonderful.

...And to all a good night. ■

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Best Of

Arnold, OJ, and the brain from Planet Arous

That's right: HIM. L.A. judge who let O.J. walk, no jail time

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

March 16, 1995

Classical Music

Feature Stories



Arnold Schoenberg teaching at UCLA. Ronald is an anagram of Arnold, by the way, further evidence of Papa S.'s alphanumeric preoccupation.

In Nicolas Slonimsky's *Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers Since Beethoven's Time*, Arnold Schoenberg has 20 pages of entries, five more than does Claude Debussy, four more than Richard Strauss. True, many of the entries, especially the earliest ones, are in both German and English, doubling his line count, but for sheer toxicity — venom — bile — the responses to his music have all others beat, put together, hands down.

"Each of the Five Orchestral Pieces," suggests one reviewer, "ends with every man choosing his note as if by lottery. This is economical music, for what is the need of rehearsal? It is a sorry bit if the wrong note will not sound better than the right one." "Right in the middle of the movements," reports another (re a performance of the

String Quartet No. 2), "there was persistent and uproarious laughter, and in the middle of the last movement people shouted at the top of their voices: 'Stop! Enough! We will not be treated like fools!' And I must confess to my sorrow that I, too, let myself be driven to similar outbursts."

Claims a third about the song cycle *Pierrot Lunaire*, "In the welter of tonalities that bruised each other as they passed and repassed, in the preliminary grip of enharmonies that almost made the ears bleed, the eyes water, the scalp freeze, I could not get a central grip on myself. Schoenberg is the crudest of all composers for he mingles with his music sharp daggers at white heat, with which he pares away tiny slices of his victim's flesh." Then my favorite, "It is a tragicomic spectacle to see Schoenberg conducting this crazy cat music, urging on the players with an entranced or despairing expression on his face. These sounds conjure up hideous visions, monstrous apparitions threaten — there is nothing of joy and light, nothing that makes life worth living! How miserable would our descendants be, if this joyless gloomy Schoenberg would ever become the mode of expression of their time!"

Which is funny, really, all the tumult, all the wrath, because I've always found this stuff a piece of cake. There've been times when Mozart has given me trouble, or Schubert, and Tchaikovsky still gives me the creeps, but never Schoenberg. It could well be my exposure to monster movies that did it, that eased the wheels — I'm not sure how this works — and I'm not even talking 'bout their monstrousness. (Because they really weren't that monstrous.) Them...the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*...*The Brain from Planet Arous* starring John Agar...non-mainstream fifties fare, discordantly (yet delightfully!) so...how ELSE to sootically support, to even try supporting, such biz? "If you really stop to listen to the music accompanying most of the grade-B horror movies that are coming out of Hollywood these days," wrote Glenn Gould a good ten years after the fact, "or a TV show on space travel for children, you will be absolutely amazed at the amount of integration which the various idioms of atonality have undergone in these media."

It's taken me years, anyway — decades — to get to the music itself, to know it by name, but get there I have. A long-delayed labor of love. (An accident still picking up steam.) In the last year or so I've tripped over, stepped across then up to, and ultimately aimed myself at Schoenberg compositions I can listen to, get mileage from, that at their very best feel like home. His String Trio, his Serenade, op. 24, any of his piano music, the entire two acts of *Moses und Aron* — big fat walls of mammal itch and scratch (and flail) — jazz I guess has also helped me get there — Ayler, Cecil Taylor, Ornette (hey, they're better, see, but not that much better) — I can just leave these pieces on all day

OK, tonality — let's get this out of the way. By the time of Monteverdi and such guys, the late Renaissance, early Baroque, they had these keys going, half steps, whole steps, seven notes each, major, minor, replacing somewhat more eclectic schemes of ordering sounds both sequential and simultaneous—modes and the like. This became the trip for the next 300 years, during which the Euro-listener's habits of accessing music qua music (as opposed to qua noise) were slowly but surely acclimated to the gravitational pull of each key's — of the key system's — axiomatic mass points — tonic, dominant, subdominant, etc. — and the byproducts of their harmonic interplay: consonance, dissonance. Dissonance was cool, you could use it for tension, for "spice" (e.g., Mozart's "Dissonant" Quartet, K. 465), but only as long as you "resolved" it before closing shop.

Time marches on. As the 19th Century worked up its full head of froth — the Romantic Era — you had people like Berlioz, Liszt and most of all Wagner (and then Strauss and Mahler) spicing their works with the entire chromatic scale — any and all of the 12 possible notes to the octave, including sharps and flats. The thinking by then: use the full expressive palette, like why the hell not? (Only squares and simps didn't.) *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner) and *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Strauss) were stews with tank cars of pepper and coriander to the unit pot. But when it came to the age-old biz about resolving the dissonance, axiom remained dogma...nobody fucked with it...an unwieldy situation (at historical critical mass). Enter: Schoenberg, who after his own bevy of Late Romantic works (*Verklarte Nacht*, *Pelleas und Melisande*, String Quartet No. 1) felt in his bones and heart the time was nigh to liberate the dissonance— no more need, no MUSICAL need, to resolve it! — once und for all.

So he went atonal, only he didn't call it that, some critic did, and remained more or less atonal for a dozen years. (Last piece in a specified key, though he didn't especially adhere to it, was the second String Quartet, 1908.) Although you really should factor in the disruptions, interruptions of World War I (including ten minutes in the Austrian army, age 41), this was not Schoenberg's most prolific period, and in any event he abandoned it. Even he was too hooked on "structure," on "discipline." But that's only half the explanation.

Sure, yeah, he was a little unnerved by the "chaos," by the lack of fixed relations between the notes, and he certainly was neurotic enough to begin with, but just as crucial was his need to find a means of avoiding tonal mishaps. 'Cause if anything goes, if any note can follow any note, you've gotta be careful lest some inadvertent

intervallic collision revert you to echoes of cornball key structure. And you're back where you started, still floundering.

So he opted for this system where all 12 notes get equal value, and the way you get 'em equal is you line 'em up, you pick a sequence using all 12 once each, one that respects none's right to behave like a tonic or a dominant, and you stick with that sequence through your entire composition. You can do things with the "row" (or "series") like turn it upside down, run it backwards, or upside down and backwards, you can use consecutive notes together as a chord, any note can be moved up or down one or more octaves, stuff like that, but your row is your row, no shaking it. 'Cause if there's no stink of key the first time through, there won't be one the 81st: freedom from key, guaranteed. Oh, and to avoid lines that might in any way resemble major-minor scales, it helps to keep your melodies jagged, full of large, even "ridiculous," leaps.

Such was, and still is, more or less, the 12-tone, or dodecaphonic (though some wags would call it dodecacophonic), system, which Schoenberg believed would assure "the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years" — only a decade into which he would have to run from Hitler into penniless exile.

Before you think there's no San Diego in this piece, let me lay something on you. The first performance of Schoenberg's arrangement for orchestra of Brahms's Piano Quartet in G Minor took place in L.A. in May 1938, conducted by that other escapee from National Socialism (and father of the man who would later play "funny Nazi" Colonel Klink on *Hogan's Heroes*), Otto Klemperer. Shortly thereafter, the composer himself conducted it in SAN DIEGO.

His stated reasons for orchestrating it: "1. I like the piece. 2. It is seldom played. 3. It is always very badly played, because the better the pianist the louder he plays and you hear nothing from the strings." While some hailed the work as "Brahms's Fifth" (he'd written four symphonies, although chronologically this would have been his zero'th), it was one of Schoenberg's more squaresville efforts, homage to one of his earliest influences, before he'd discovered Wagner. The last movement in particular is a big hokey slab of kitsch. All in all, kind of a cheesy piece. (San Diego gets cheese.)

Still, it does pull off one interesting (and worthwhile) trick: the Brahms piece is itself made less schmoozy. Brahms was this guy, see, this old fart, this literal reactionary, who thought of himself as an "antidote" to the alleged excesses of Wagner but who

in his own dumb way was at least as excessive, and certainly more cloyingly oppressive, about telegraphing his dramatics with harmonics, spotlighting, underlining, dressing everything in gratuitous (jazz term) “heavy changes”...sort of a Billy Joel to Wagner’s, oh, Johnny Rotten. What Schoenberg does — no mean feat — is undercut (at least allay) the harmonic oppressiveness, the italicized fatness, that in some of Brahms’s chamber works (especially) can get under yer skin like scabies. A take on harmonic color/flavor (and payability) that goes beyond the mere issue of “consonance vs. dissonance.” In any case: a deconstruction (in deed if not word) of Romantic Era folderol without recourse to atonality or its dodeca-anything corollary. It’s subtle, though — you could miss it.

‘Tain’t much subtle about the String Trio of 1946. A ferocious 12-tone helping, “violent”? — call it violent—strings like razor blades, like razor ribbon, icepicks scraped along skin or a blackboard (take your pick), a heart scraped on concrete—stops, starts, fits, starts, flutters and stiffenings (and loosenings)...naked music, spooky and also serene, “turmoil”/“repose” (but never that topical), extremes till you drop, a meat-mile of emotional turf traversed (but without guide-dog schematics). And while it is highly emotional, no denying that, its pulse is not the flow of blood but the irregular (i.e., regular!) seepage of hormones, of come-as-you-go pressure-cooked cerebral ooze and gush — premeditated music with no possible premeditated audience p.o.v., so unpredictable it voids any and all anticipations of future, locking you into the slowly unfolding (too slowly unfolding) (never unfolding) present...a nice tough “listen,” Jack!

And the program note that should go with this, well, on August 2 of that year, in the aftermath of being given benzedrine as a new trial medication for his chronic asthma, Schoenberg suffered a massive heart attack, during which his pulse completely stopped, requiring an injection of some-such (not benzedrine) directly in the heart. He would later refer to this incident as his “fatality,” and to the Trio as “the only piece ever written by a dead man.”

Speaking of ferocity: *Moses und Aron*. Schoenberg’s longest (two acts, completed in ’32; in ’45 he applied for a grant to finish the third, was turned down) opera has the goods. All opera, all operatic vocals, to my ears anyway, are a fistful of razor blades — the human voice brandished as a weapon — independent of thematic content or melodic intent. Which is fine, great — love that menace! — but rarely if ever do the instrumental lashings meet the vocals halfway. This big, glaring gap in the middle, y’know? Well here, finally, are orchestral textures to give the vocals a run for their

money, making for a sonic event of more walloping, bloodying BIBLICAL PROPORTION than, say, Haydn's *The Creation* or Handel's *Messiah*.

In case you're wondering why there's only one "A" in "Aron," two would've meant 13 letters in both German and English (though why not just use an ampersand?), something Schoenberg was morbidly superstitious about. (He would eventually die on July 13, 1951, age 76: $7 + 6 = 13$.) Seven, on the other hand, was a fortuitous number. His *Serenade*, op. 24, utilized seven instruments, seven movements, but he blew it with a setting of what he believed to be Petrarch's 217th sonnet — 7x31— when in fact it was his 218th.

"Schoenberg's personality," wrote Slonimsky, "combined elements of decisive affirmation and profound self-negation." He was easily pissed off, in the midst of genuine horrors tended towards flights of arcane paranoia, was as distracted by

adulation as persecution, and could be a royal asshole to stranger and cohort alike.

In 1911, in response to efforts by Alban Berg (who along with Schoenberg and Anton Webern formed what became known as the Second Vienna School — first had been Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven) to raise money enabling him, Berg's guru, to move to Berlin, he wrote, "Wake up! Be a man!"

Seven years later, to trick up a safe venue for the presentation of new music by himself and his colleagues, he founded the Society for Private Musical Performances—members only, no press, no applause allowed.

In Hollywood in the mid-'30s, when producer Irving Thalberg kept him waiting 20 minutes, Schoenberg huffed and puffed *and nearly stormed out, only to blow any chance he had of writing the score for The Good Earth* by demanding \$50,000 (which while outrageous was not unthinkable) and a guarantee that every note would be used unaltered (which was).

During teaching stints at both USC and UCLA, he was less than thrilled that the bulk of his students were in his mind "amateurs," and showed them little compassion. Decades later, in a recitation midway through his own *Indeterminacy*, former student John Cage tells the story of another UCLA'er deemed musical layperson. Asked by Schoenberg to play the first movement of a Beethoven sonata, which is afterward to be analyzed, a coed responds that the piece is too difficult. Schoenberg insists she play it, only to stop her for not playing at the proper tempo.

When she tells him that if she plays at that tempo she'll make mistakes, he says, "Play at the proper tempo and don't make mistakes." She blows it, bursts into tears, and between sobs explains that she had a tooth pulled that morning, to which he replies, "Do you need to have a tooth pulled in order to make mistakes?"

Even fellow Hitler escapee (and, well, friend) Thomas Mann felt the sting of the master's touchiness. When the Nobel laureate's *Doktor Faustus*, whose main character resembles Schoenberg vaguely for about 30 seconds, came out in '47, the latter threw a shit fit. Through the intercession of Alma Werfel (Mahler's widow) he wangled an afterword in future editions which reads in part, "It does not seem supererogatory to inform the reader that the form of composition delineated in Chapter XXII, known as the 12-tone or row system, is in truth the intellectual property of a contemporary composer and theorist, Arnold Schoenberg. I have transferred this technique, in a certain ideational context, to the fictitious figure of a musician" — but this spooked him even more. Well I've read the chapter and lemme tell ya, it's as superficial a gloss on things musical, as innocuously topical, as Thomas Pynchon's reference to either Ornette Coleman or Gerry Mulligan (some either/or, eh? — sax player with a rhythm section minus piano) in the short story "Entropy." 'S benign, man — a setup for a talk on "freedom" versus "subjectivity" — and this li'l nothin' aggrieved him? The spooker gets spooked?

Sulked Schoenberg in the *Saturday Review*, "Mr. Mann was not so generous as I, who had given him good chance to free himself from the ugly aspect of a pirate. He gave an explanation: a few lines which he hid at the end of the book on a page where no one ever would see it. Besides, he added a new crime to his first in the attempt to belittle me: he calls me 'a (a!) contemporary composer and theoretician.' " Arnie, work out!

One of the few who apparently never let him down (maybe 'cuz he died too soon) was George Gershwin, of all people, whom Schoenberg befriended during the latter's final West Coast stand, playing tennis at his house every chance he got. Usually, because of Schoenberg's age, doubles were played, with weak lobs aimed his way to give him something to return.

Other hobbies in L.A.: Ping-Pong, dogs and rabbits, bookbinding. He still painted, but less. Back in Europe, painting had been more than a hobby, however, a "pastime." He took it as seriously as composing — "the same to me as making music" — and hobnobbed with Kokoschka and Schiele, the *Blaue Reiter* crowd. Kandinsky said of Schoenberg's early canvases, "In your pictures I perceive the real especially

strongly.” He took lessons from an upstairs neighbor, the Austrian expressionist Richard Gerstl, whom Mathilde, the first Mrs. Schoenberg, ran off with, only to return, at which point Gerstl destroyed most of his own artwork and disemboweled himself with a butcher knife (a nice story).

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The Arnold Schoenberg Institute at USC has a stash of some 200 Schoenbergs, including pics of Mathilde, of second wife Gertrud, of Berg and Mrs. Berg, but more than a fifth are self-portraits. One of the all-time great baldies, possessor of the sort of bald Dennis the Menace once addressed with, “Hey, you sure got a lot of face to wash!”—yet there’s no vanity, no coverup, no posing with hats. Not even in outdoor self-portraits, like this one from ’11 where he’s carrying a cane (or umbrella), a rear-angle shot with glowing dome, did he paint himself hatted...way to go!

Fast forward: the bald continues. One of the great living baldies — you’ve seen him on TV, in the papers — yes you have! — is Ronald Schoenberg. Ronald Schoenberg...Ronald Schoenberg?...that’s right: HIM. L.A. judge who let O.J. walk, no jail time, after beating up — the time he just beat her up — Nicole. Uproar, furor; all the heat Ron has had to endure in the wake of u-know-what. Demands for his resignation, early retirement, dismemberment, etcet. Is the SON OF MR. TWELVE-TONE — ain’t life

funny?

It gets funnier. 360 North Rockingham Ave., Brentwood — an address you know, right? O.J.’s estate, where they arrested him, found the glove, all that shit. Well, not far from 360 N. Rockingham is 116 (either N. or S., Willi Reich’s *Schoenberg: A Critical Biography*— he’s a foreigner, natch—doesn’t specify) Rockingham, where the Family Schoenberg moved when daddy took the UCLA gig, where they lived at the time of Ronald’s birth (11/26/37), and where Ron grew up with all the dogs, bunnies, and ping-pong balls. Rockingham is discontinuous at Sunset Boulevard, so it’s either a couple blocks or let’s say five with a break somewhere between, but in any event: neighborhood. (Neighbors at various times included Judy Garland at 129 S., Pat O’Brien at 196 S., and Shirley Temple at 209 N.)

Ronald is an anagram of Arnold, by the way, further evidence of Papa S.’s alphanumeric preoccupation. The last Schoenberg child, Lawrence, was gonna be named Roland till the wife of director William Dieterle (*The Life of Emile Zola*, *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, *Elephant Walk*) raised some cogent astrological stink... fuggaduck.

And my family, er, my impending relation (by marriage) to food researcher MaryEllen Flot, is on hold pending determination as to whether we indeed, in fact can “live together.” What better way to determine this — I’m thinking — than to lay some Schoenberg on her? I should be allowed to have this stuff on all the time, right? Or if not all, some (at least with headphones). Her own taste runs to the soundtrack from *Sleepless in Seattle*, the original cast album from Tovarich.

Let’s play her some shit and see how she takes it....

THREE PIANO PIECES, OP. 11, NO. 3

MaryEllen: It’s not so bad. I like ping-ping piano music, and he’s got a little bit of banging, which is okay. But it’s not crazy, hard to listen to, effect for effect sake.

PIANO PIECE, OP. 33A

M: There’s about four songs here — the beginnings of maybe four good songs. But then he goes stop, go, stop, go. I wouldn’t mind if he took just even one of those things, like some of it sounds like a song from the ’30s or ’40s. If he just took one of them and developed it into some nice little reminiscence...

FIVE PIANO PIECES, OP. 23, NO. 2

M: It’s almost — I was gonna say it’s quite nice, but it’s really not. It’s on the way to being okay—it doesn’t quite take off. The sounds are neither bad nor are they good — in my opinion.

FIVE PIECES FOR ORCHESTRA, OP. 16

M: I don’t like this. There are elements that could be exciting if...once again he does the thing I hate where he takes a little bit of something and a little bit of something else, he puts them together and it just becomes loud noise. It’s grating.

Richard: Isn’t this like every soundtrack you’ve ever heard?

M: Well, if it’s a soundtrack, theoretically you’re interested in the story and the music is just there to punctuate certain action while something’s going on and get you through the picture.

R: I disagree. There isn't one movie that uses music that could exist without the music — the soundtrack delivers the movie.

M: It carries you through it, but you're not listening to it as music....

R: If they took the music out of *Philadelphia*, for instance, would it fool a pinhead?

M: Well, I don't like movies that have music like this.

R: You don't like thrillers? You don't like Hitchcock movies?

M: Okay, but not a steady diet of this. I wouldn't watch this movie.

R: You've watched hundreds of movies like this.

M: Okay, whatever you say.

VERKLARTE NACHT, OP. 4 (STRING SEXTET VERSION)

M: All right, this is classic movie music, and what's interesting, people today, you would consider them hacks for making this music because they would just be doing it for the movies, I don't think you... It's very sad, though.

R: It's sad, you like things when they're sad, so why do you call it hack?

M: There was something about it just at the beginning where it did feel that it was very manipulative, I mean its only use would be in the movies. But maybe it was heartfelt when he did it. Did he do this for the movies?

R: MaryEUen, he never once in his life wrote for an actual movie.

M: Oh, so they utUized him for the movies. R: They ripped him off!

M: You mean he wrote this by and for himself?

R: Yes he did.

M: In that case, I like it very much. There's some parts in the middle where I find it hard to take because I guess he was so—who knows what? I mean he does seem to be connected to some pure emotional something in him. And who wants to be

around someone in so much pain? But the beginning part I really loved because it was nicely sad.

STRING TRIO, OP. 45

M: There's no occasion I can imagine where I would listen to this. I hate it. It's totally annoying, abrasive, it doesn't — even if there's a good sound or two he doesn't follow...

If you decide you wanna like an opera, or opera in yeneral,
it's an act of will.

R: What sounds are you talking about?

M: Well, there was one little pingy kind of...some things that won't pierce your ears.

R: You have pierced ears.

M: I'm talking about ear drums, Richard. The whole point is I can't imagine why anyone, what occasion would someone choose to play this music?

R: Well, what about writing this music? He wrote it after almost dying of a heart attack.

M: Oh, no wonder it sounds like that. Like he was very upset.

R: Who knows if he was upset? Maybe this was his affirmation of life.

M: This was not positive, this doesn't...but I could see him writing, it would get your heart going again. You're lying dead and you hear this kind of music and your heart starts, like a clicker, like one of those things where they say, "Clear." But I'd rather get my heart moving with even rock and roll. Not heavy metal. Well maybe heavy metal.

PIERROT LUNAIRE, OP. 21

M: You've got to be kidding.

R: Kidding about what?

M: Now let me ask you a question, do people listen to...

R: You're always saying "listen" as opposed to why it was written — what is he trying to express to listeners? I mean Michael Bolton has listeners.

M: Okay, fine, you can create anything you wanna create, but people don't have to wanna be the audience for it. Yes — there is something, there's pure expression in this — yes. A lot of impulsive...

R: Don't you ever try to sing? Don't you sound quite a bit like this?

M: Well when I do, ha, I don't impose it on others.

R: You've often imposed it on me. But the question is what is it — as something sung — that you object to so strongly?

M: Well, okay, when I hear a baby crying my first impulse is usually to go and try to make that baby stop crying.

R: Like stab the baby?

M: No, like maybe hold the baby, do something nice for the baby. If the baby still won't stop crying, I try to turn it over to someone else who can find out what's wrong with the baby.

R: This doesn't sound anything like a baby!

M: Well, it's got primitive sound, it's an obvious cry for help. There's something very primal, first-level about it, I mean it's certainly about the creator and not the receiver of the art. To the extent that this music reminds you of me, that's fine. Who says the art we create is the art we wanna create?

SUITE FOR PIANO, THREE WIND AND THREE STRINGED INSTRUMENTS, OP. 29

M: I don't like it at all. If I were doing my food research, having nothing to do with this, if I'm just in the room with it, it would distract me, make me angry. It's just, well aside from, music does not always have to be pleasant. But it's closer to noise than it is to music.

R: What kind of noise is it close to? Is it like a washing machine?

M: No.

R: A vacuum cleaner?

M: No, you know what it's more like? It's not even, well those car alarms have more even rhythms, I mean I'm enjoying some of those car alarms they have recently.

R: Then they're not doing their job, they're not alarming.

M: No, this music is more alarming.

R: That would seem good.

M: Richard, do you like to have this music on in your home?

R: I certainly do.

M: What do you like it for?

R: For one thing, it's foreground, it's music that asks to be listened to, as opposed to blends in like wallpaper, disappears into the void.

M: Exactly. It's screaming at you, "Listen to me! Listen to me!" I have enough things screaming at me in my life. I like music I can get lost in.

R: You can't get lost in this?

M: No, I'm fighting this kind of music!

R: Then by lost, I mean you could very easily get lost in this — lose your bearings, whatever — you mean music you can fall asleep to.

M: Or music that gives me a feeling of wellbeing. Like sometimes I'll just have music on, classical music at that, and it makes it seem that everything is right with the world, and I like that.

STRING QUARTET NO. 3, OP. 30

M: This I don't mind, but it could be because it's strings.

R: You didn't like the string trio.

M: I don't like screechy strings, this isn't screechy. But I'll tell you something, this is definitely movie music. I could definitely see it in a movie.

R: Like *Gone with the Wind*?

M: Well, in some sort of...okay, I can tell you exactly what I could see this in. This could be a suspense movie where some character is going into, he's looking through some papers, some things, he's not a detective, he's looking for something really important.

R: "Looking for important things" music?

M: Ha-ha.

MOSES UND ARON

M: You know, opera's very tricky. If you decide you wanna like an opera, or opera in general, it's an act of will, because there's so much going on that is not, like you don't understand the language, people are communicating in these voices that are not real but are representative of emotional states, it's poetry, but it's not penetrable, and so a person has to say up front, "I am affected by this, I like this, I go into this world without question." And I guess on that basis one could accept this as fine. I don't fully accept it, however.

PIANO CONCERTO, OP. 42

M: This is very nice. It's got my favorite kinds of sound — ping, ping — but it's also got other instruments involved — nicely. It's sometimes — it's interesting, because it's not just one thing, it's got a lot of colors going on, a foreground and background kind of feeling, and the underneath of it feels a bit more complex than the top. And it's not flouncy, and it could be, like what's his name, Prokofiev.

A SURVIVOR FROM WARSAW, OP. 46

M: The sound feels totally invasive. This is worse than any of the others. There couldn't be any reason to put this on my CD player. Maybe if I had neighbors I didn't like who were annoying me with their music, I'd put this on very loud — and I'd add to it with my own animal sounds.

R: What if I tell you this is Holocaust music, his tribute to, the words of a survivor from a concentration camp.

M: Well, I'm sure his heart was in the right place. But it's too hard to listen to.

R: What, you want the *Schindler's List* version?

M: It doesn't feel to me like this has any more depth to it than *Schindler's List*. I mean he's a better musician, a better artist, better composer — everything is "better." But I don't know if anything he's expressing is any more effective, y'know in its arrow to the target. *Schindler's List*, manipulative or not, would make me cry. This just makes me cringe.

R: Isn't that the object? You want people to remember a horrible event, you want them to cry — get it over with — or cringe?

M: To tell you the truth, you want them to remember on the right side. If you want people to be your allies, you don't send them to concentration camps — this puts the listener in the camp and they can't escape.

R: Isn't there a little more, um, accuracy this way — y'know emotional verisimilitude?

M: Maybe there is, but I'm not interested in it. My interest is to protect myself — from the sound. Before it makes me even more on edge.

Well, that wasn't too painful, not for me, so just to see if she was actually listening, ha, let's play her an assortment of stuff and see if she can pick out the Schoenberg.

CARL RUGGLES, *Sun-Treader*

M: This definitely could be him, but I don't think so. It's a little too expansive, and a little more even and to the point than he usually is. This is definitely what I'd call "high seas" music, like on the ocean.

SCHOENBERG, *Gurrelieder*

M: Well, there are no telltale signs one way or the other. It's actually very lovely, it's not at all assaulting. But I couldn't rule it out, because maybe you're tricking me.

ANTHONY BRAXTON, *Composition 107*

M: I don't think this is Schoenberg, because there are too many spaces, there are elements of Schoenberg but too much silence. I hate it anyway.

EDGAR VARESE, *Integrates*

M: You know what this sounds like, for some reason? Rimsky-Korsakov. But it also sounds more modern than Schoenberg.

FRANK ZAPPA, *None of the Above*

M: I think this is Schoenberg, it has some telltale signs, like the way the violin went like a sad string down and then it went into another instrument, kind of jarring in all at once. Like real pulses of emotion and then something else jumping in the way.

R-. Well, actually it's by Frank Zappa. And the lovely one was Schoenberg.

M: I should've known it was a trick.

R: So how do you feel to learn it's Zappa?

M: I'm shocked! What a surprise. You would think it would be too modern. Do you think it sounds like Schoenberg?

R: It sounds like a lot of things, he listened to a lot of old music when he wrote it — 40–50 years old. Most of everything he ever did is derivative of one thing or another. Do you like the piece? M: Yeah.

R: Did you like it before you knew it was Zappa?

M: It's not that I like it better knowing it's Frank Zappa, but maybe I like Frank Zappa better knowing he used Schoenberg — it just gives him a little more substance. But none of these pieces would I listen to on my own.

I'm feeling sneaky now...let's do it again — this time with all five pieces by Schoenberg.

CHAMBER SYMPHONY NO. 2, OP. 38

M: Again, this seems like “sea music” — that’s just a personal category with me. Because this part we’re listening to now, if it isn’t the sea, well it could be — calm, green — you know this part doesn’t have anything to do with the sea. I don’t know, fortunately or unfortunately, but this could be in a movie where the girl is just getting on with her life, she’s just wandering from room to room through the early scenes.

DIE GLÜCKLICHE HAND, OP. 18

M: Offhand, only if there’s no tricks, offhand I’d say this is Schoenberg. It has that push-pull. All these contrary, uh, sounds that could be from different parts of, different parts of the body, different parts of the world, different parts of a stage.

CABARET SONGS (1901)

M: Fine background music, it doesn’t offend me one way or the other. But it’s too nice to be Schoenberg, although that other one was nice too. You wouldn’t trick me that way twice.

VON HEUTE AUF MORGEN, OP. 32

M: It could be. He wrote operas, it’s an opera, it sounds awful. But if it wasn’t it wouldn’t surprise me either.

DREI VOLKSLIEDER, OP. 49

M: This is very nice, but then I like choruses. I don’t know if he wrote choruses, but this doesn’t sound anything like him. It’s very good-natured.

R: So which would you guess was Schoenberg’s?

M: I’ll pick the opera. The other opera sounded just like it.

R: Well, actually, he wrote them all. How do you feel about that?

M: Well, it could very well be — except for maybe the chorus. Because they all did sound like him, including the background music.

R: So how do you feel about him — emotionally, intellectually, etc. — if he could do this many different kinds of music?

M: I have more respect for him than I have a natural leaning for him. I definitely feel like he's, yes, one has to respect his artistry.

R: But do you respect his artistry more having heard the sappier material than the...

M: Well it's not just the sappy material, if you think of the other stuff, how complex it really is. But it's mostly all neurotic, it's very neurotic.

R: So is Beethoven.

M: No he's not! What Beethoven is neurotic?

R: What about dah dah duh DAH?

M: Okay, that's neurotic. I can definitely see that.

Not long after Schoenberg's death, an article appeared in the British music mag *The Score* entitled "Schoenberg Is Dead," and fair enough, he was. Its author, however, the young French composer Pierre Boulez, had more in mind than certifying the fatality: he wished to flog the corpse and stomp it down a few yards deeper in the mud. "I am a conservative forced to become a radical," Schoenberg had once said, and as far as Boulez was concerned, truer words had not been spoken. By his reckoning, the older composer, once so progressive — grandpa to the goddam row f r crying out loud — had in recent decades become "irrelevant." Sure, he'd been "serial" about pitch, heck, but not about duration, timbre, intensity, and attack — name your variables. Announcing a "total serialism" that would sweep almighty etc. in its wake, Boulez also assailed the dead man's lack of asceticism (!) — which is kind of like faulting whiskey for containing water.

And yet — dig it — Boulez the conductor has done right by Schoenberg, presenting the man's work (all periods) with great respect and (too strong a word but I'll use it) affection, producing definitive recordings of even stuff like the ultra-backward-looking

Gurrelieder. And yet even so, even today when he's less, well, radical himself, his recent CD guide to the music of this century, *Passeport pour le XXe siecle*, contains not a single selection by Schoenberg...you figure it.

Bozo students, bozo audiences (for programing Schoenberg's Violin Concerto, Leopold Stokowsky got fired by the Philadelphia Orchestra), and his \$38 UCLA pension aside, a decisive factor in Schoenberg's terminal discomfort with America had to be the unsettling presence of ruling modernist pickle-herring Igor Stravinsky. Both lived in L.A., hung out in emigre circles, they had friends in common but, according to most accounts, never met. One might see the other at a distance, some gathering, a public place, and promptly split. In the only report I've found of them actually meeting, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* claims they once crossed paths at a downtown food market, speaking curtly in English, shaking hands stiffly.

The musical gulf between 'em outdid the personal. From the 1920s onward, the artistic personas of Schoenberg and Stravinsky could not have been more antipodal: systematist vs. eclectic; revolutionary vs. neo-classicist; eater of broken glass vs. maker of elegant drawing room miniatures. From day one, Schoenberg never much cared for Stravinsky's work (favoring, for inst, the historically lighter fare of Puccini), going so far as to lampoon him (in the second of his Three Parodies, 1925) as "little Modernsky." Though in 1912 he attended a rehearsal of *Pierrot Lunaire*, later calling it "the great event in my life then," and in program notes to his own Violin Concerto praised Schoenberg's as "the only masterpiece in the field" — as eclectic as he was, Stravinsky never felt musically driven to toy around with things 12-tone...not, that is, until after Schoenberg was dead and gone, at which point he hopped to it, scoring neo-avant browny points with the ballet *Agon*, the choral work *Threni*, and *In Memoriam Dylan Thomas*.

Schoenberg's final words on music paper (the soprano part to *Modem Psalm No. 1*) were "*Und trotzdem bete ich*" ("And, for all that, I pray" or "And still I pray"). His final word, spoken, was "Harmony."

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Best Of

Countdown to oblivion in Lawrence Welk Village

Ah-one, ah-two, ah-three

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

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Escondido



The guard: a smiling bejeweled grandfatherly type like a town father on The Andy Griffith Show, someone who'd've offered Opie an apple for the answer to a tricky math problem.

..duh duhu...when I'm 64. Well I am. One old fart and a half. But I still ain't got the hang of it. Being a geezer. An old fuck. A senior "citizen." Citizen of what, I ask — the land of universal cancer?



In the last ten months, aside from getting my back adjusted, my blood pressure modified, my specs upgraded and my hemorrhoids scraped. I've had my first surgical stroll with Mister "C." Basal cell carcinoma. Skin cancer. Well, sure, it wurn't no *melanoma* — but fuh. Getting cancer *avoiding* the sun, meeting (but never greeting) the fucker only en route to the shade, marinating my façade in sunblock, wearing high-collar longsleeves (in summer) and wide-brim hats — and then this pal of mine gets lung "C" never having smoked a cigareet: if AIDS don't get us first, "C" is our Destiny.



Although, okay, maybe it was only Little "C," this pearly molelike whatsit the size of a couple-three pinheads, one small hatpin, but to off it they hadda cut a three-inch slice above it, below it and especially to the sides, and when they stitched me up I looked like Raymond Massey in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and eight months later it's a red three-inch worm crawling down my neck which I tell people I got in a knife fight with an editor. I don't mind fictions but gee, to have to write 'em...you write 'em.



And if I got it once, never going near the sun, I will damn sure get it again — a worm for the other side of my neck, or a centipede for my chin, a lizard for my cheek...my earlobe, they'll just clip it all off. And if I can get *that* kinda cancer, not having willfully or knowingly contributed to *it* causally, how can I miss getting cancers of the pancreas, liver, tongue, sinus and scrotum? Incisions, excavations, tissue down the dumper, tubes in my veins, chemotherapy, emotherapy...and I'm not talking fear of death, or even fear. I'm just talking normal wear and tear...



I can see it all coming: young whippersnaps cussing me out for slowing things down on the goddam escalator...falling down nightly en route to the pisser and breaking my weasel...wearing a helmet to bed so I don't smash my etc. on the etc.; a goddam diaper...prostate pills and constipation pills and Parkinson's pills...what a dismal geezer call-it-a-life. Jack.



Which, like I said, I just can't seem to get the hang of...the orientation, the "attitude" — adequate "prep" for the fugging Inevitable. No shirker of duty, of unwanted chores — if I wanna see how it's done, I might as well go where they do it in spades (and I don't mean clubs): a wonderful weekend at the Lawrence Welk Hotel and Resort, Escondido.



HORSE-ASS REALISM

Established in 1964 by famed orchestra leader Lawrence Welk, the resort began as a four-room motel with a modest restaurant and clubhouse bordering a nine-hole golf course. Lawrence Welk's "little bit of heaven on earth" has since developed into a beautiful 1000 acre self-contained destination resort located at the gateway to San Diego's wine country.

According to the Resort Property Owners Association, a national consumer information bureau, the Lawrence Welk Resort is one of only six resorts in the Southwest to have earned a top rating of "10" based on guest experience and positive consumer feedback, and it is the only resort in California to receive this top rating. In addition, the Welk property is named 14th in the 'Top 400' properties nationwide by *Lodging Hospitality magazine*.

The Resort Restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, and guests may dine in casual elegance overlooking the golf course fairway. The best in Southern California cuisine may be ordered from the menu, or one may prefer the tempting luncheon or dinner buffet featuring carved meats.

— Lawrence Welk Resort press release



Rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain, rain. A multi-hour boat ride — from 5 to 78 to 15 to Mountain Meadow exit to Champagne Blvd. to...where the hell's the road? — before me and the missus finally arrive, hungry as fuckshit, at 9:05 PM...all right, let's eat. The desk broad, an overly cheery 18-to-30-year-old, regrets to inform us of the restaurant's closing at 9. "*The restaurant?*" "Yes, we only have one. The closest thing open is in Escondido." Rain, rain, rain, rain...enough to float the moon. I have drove my last mile of the night. In a painting behind the desk, a dozen horse butts stare out of frame as a dozen riders and 48 hooves make dusty tracks for sunset and food.

On another wall: a large canvas portrait, no, photo of the bandleader himself with grin and golf bag. Uneven brush strokes (acrylic gel? linseed oil?) give shine to the surface of an actual untextured photograph (rather than an image, photo or 4-color, printed on stroke-textured paper), producing, though inadequately at best, not so much the illusion of photo-realism, i.e., that what it "looks like" is a photo, as the illusion of its being a photo-realist *painting*. Art contriving — and failing — to appear *more* ersatz rather than less...far out. From beneath his coat of strokes the leader seems to say: "Heaven on earth, suckers! Heaven on earth!"

"You sure you got nothing *here*?" I ask. "Oh well, there's a vending machine outside the pro shop — candy bars and cookies." "That's it?" "And peanuts or something, or chips, in the lounge — as long as it's open." Now you're talkin'.

DANCE OF THE INFIDELS

And not simply peanuts: glucose-coated peanut matter. And sodium-rich pretzel bits, Pepperidge Farm Goldfish, Pepperidge Farm Butterflies, salty toasty crouton things. Mike the bartender can appreciate our plight, and he refills our bowl with commendable dispatch...a fucking prince.

Three brands of crème de menthe, that geezer holiday treat, and two of crème de cacao. Wild Turkey 101, Stolichnaya, Bushmill's, but no Carstairs, no Imperial — only high-booty hooch in this cozy den. Akvavit? Hmm...I don't see Akvavit. "What kind of beer you got?" "What kind do you want?" "Oh, something like Bass Ale." "Well, our imports are Heineken and Corona." "What's on tap?" "Michelob." "Uh...okay, two."

Ceiling: black plastic w/ flashing "stars." Are they in actual constellation configurations? Dunno. 8x10 glossies of Lawrence on the wall. I ask Mike if he ever actually comes in, y'know this very room. "Not lately, because of his health. He used to come maybe once a month. Sometimes even brought his accordion." "And played?" "Played."

In the alcove behind the bar an unWelkish, not unjazzy amplified guitarist drowns out the rain playing/singing "New York, New York," then a Willie Nelson song, then a Bette Midler, injecting a lick from (of all things) Thelonious Monk's "Straight No Chaser." A short, plump senior in a red V-neck yells out for six Black Russians. No response, he yells again. Mike, sensing provocation: "Okay—we'll get to it."

THE VARIETIES OF THE FATSO EXPERIENCE — Fewer than ten porkers, male, not all of them bald, most remaining hairs grey, in V-necks, cardigans, crew necks (red, beige, white, green), no conspicuous jewelry; an equal number of fatties, female, with 2-lb.

earrings, hair recently in rollers, lightly teased and sprayed, some golden blonde, some silver-blue (but no pink), primary-color sweaters, decorated w/ embroidery and doodads. Underneath sweaters, both sexes, a shitload of Ban-Lon (does that still exist?) in lieu of current synthetics. No visible cancer scars. Everyone *impeccably* groomed.

On the silent huge-screen TV — an accident but dig it: a rerun of *The Golden Girls*. Featuring more, but not radically more, made-up versions of babes in the rm. "Pregnancy & alcohol do not mix" warning over the bar: nobody here has been pregnant in the last 40 years.

A feisty couple in sopping golf duds, 65ish, saunter in. All the way from Petaluma...two days on the road...reservations six months back. "We were thinking, hey, maybe we'd play *thirty-six* holes today...think again." "Didn't even bring an umbrella." "Shoot." "Double shoot."

I WON'T DANCE — DON'T ASK ME. Michael Ventura — what a goofus — once wrote: "Our generation will never get old, because we dance." He was talking about *his* generation, of course, but well here's oldies dancing and they're *old*. I myself, through every phase my gen has been through, have pretty much danced for one reason only — courtship. Strutting feathers for nookie, and right now I've got nookie — Gopi — Mrs. M. Three couples slow-dance the "old-fashioned" way, spinning and dipping and shit. The dames seem to be enjoying themselves, can't really tell with the men. Fast dance, a dame dances with a dame, they giggle like KR-R-RAZY, the husband of one urges 'em: "All the way, all the way!" Gopi (I could see it coming): "You wanna?" "Uh...later.." Beer and pretzels, pretzels and beer — nummy numms!

IN ALL LANGUAGES

Welk is German for *faded, withered; (of the skin) flabby, flaccid*. *Welk* in English is an alternate spelling for *whelk*, not the one defined as *any of numerous large marine snails (as of the genus Buccinum), esp. one (B. undatum) much used as food in Europe*, but that which serves as synonym for *papule, pustule; welt, wheal*. Withered Lawrence Pus.

GEEZERS IN THE RAIN WITHOUT REMOTE

Reading Popeye comics with those funny looking hag people on an island.

Sponsored

His sister was home but he didn't fug her.

A bath and a shower they did not take.

Green & purple motherfucking *shit* in the house.

Then it rained.

— W.H. Auden. "Nice Day If It Doesn't Rain"

Gloomy Saturday. An under-50 couple across the way — youngsters — wave from *their* rainwet window to ours...nice friendly folks.

Rain rain go 'way, but in the meantime let's play Got...Don't Got with the contents of our luxury suite. Kingsize bed...got. Pillows...got. Pastel coloration...got. Legless cylindrical table...got. Twin night tables...got. Desk...got. Phone...got. Minor...got. Mirrored closet...got. Hookless anti-theft hangers...got. Uncomfy chair...don't got. Comfy chair...got three of 'em. Trash can w/ Hefty bag liner...got two. Table lamp...got. Floor lamp...got. Wall lamp...got. Ceiling light above entrance...got. Stucco ceiling...got. Patio with lawn chairs...got. Carpet w/out bum holes...got. Rudimentary coffee machine...got. Complimentary coffee...got. Heat and A/C...got. Heat lamp in the crapper...got. "Santa Fe" bathroom wallpaper...got. Shower cap...got. Soap...got. Conditioning shampoo...got. Hand & body lotion...got. Tissues...got. Toilet paper...got two full rolls.

Framed triptych of shiny pebble photos...got. Pseudo-Paul Klee watercolor of palms and boots...got. "Abstract" painting of spread legs and lady's pudenda...got. Individually wrapped lubricated condom...don't got. Looks like, but it's only a sewing kit. Safety pin, needle, buttons, black, brown, blue, pink, white, grey treads, make that threads...got. Writing paper...got. Writing implement...don't got. Complimentary postcard...don't got. *The Lawrence Welk Show Musical Family News*...got. *Temecula Valley Magazine*...got. Restaurant menu...got. Cable TV...got. TV listings...don't got. Remote control...don't got. Holy Bible...don't got.

No bible, no listings, no remote, so we hand-crank the set and take what we get. *Some Came Running* on superstation WWOR, New York. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Martha Hyer, Shirley MacLaine. Vincente Minnelli's third or fourth best (or is it his third or fourth worst?) film, an interesting sociological curio. Class struggle in

Terre Haute '58 ('46?) but not much struggle...“sluts” and poker...slumming...Frank finds his center of class gravity. Commercial: “If your wife says you’re a drunk...and your kids say you’re a drunk...and your boss says...friends say...dog says you’re a drunk...you’re a drunk. Call 1-800...” — a *great* New York commercial.

Speaking of which, or of what, the first and only time I ever in fact watched Lawrence Welk’s Saturday night whatsis was in New York. Wait, I take that back, there was a second, but the first was like late '56, early '57, winter, my family had just been getting *TV Guide* on a regular basis for a couple months. I was 10 or 11, and this one week I got sent out to get it, a candy store four blocks away, this was Friday, we needed it for Saturday, a v. urgent mission, Friday night in a snowstorm. It was 15 cents then, and I remember dropping a nickel and having to pull off a glove to dig it out of the snow, hadn't brought any extra change of my own. Last *Guide* in the place. The cover was tan or orange.

I didn’t usually read the TV “news items” then, text without pictures, but my mother did, and that week they had a bit about the “surprise hit of the season” — *The Lawrence Welk Show*. ‘S always nice to spice up yer dreary life, family doldrums can always use dynamite, at least change, so she talks us into watching it — “It won’t kill us.” I remember it went on at 9? I can tell you also what we watched it instead of (*Gale Storm* and *Hey Jeannie*), I can even recall what we ate that night (English muffin pizzas), but I can’t remember dick about the show. No recollection, nuthin’. No, that’s wrong, “Champagne Music” — I remember the phrase and remember thinking (not having drunk the stuff yet) that champagne must be like lemon-lime soda left in the sun for a week. Enough experimental t-viewing. We never as a family watched the sumbitch again.

In '67 and '8, deep in the heart of Psychedelia, I watched TV, when I watched it at all, for one purpose alone: to accompany the taking of drugs. Sound on or off, no matter; when it was on, it was usually to supply an occasion for frontally “goofing” on things. This was, after all, when TV had momentarily lost its power and expertise to suck you in, plant a ring in your nose, connected by long invisible chain to...gotcha. (Drugs were a great, great liberator!) In the wake of which they sat down and decided — “think tanks” and such — that TV should and would never again relinquish its heart-mind-soul control over all us saps at sea...it hasn’t...(even drugs today have been totally stripped of their liberating function)... it only gets nastier all the time. So anyway, one Saturday, probably '68, nothing better to do, I turn on Lawrence. He’s by now got a black tap-dancer...a rock combo that looked like something out of *The Gene Krupa Story* (that drug era!)...a light show. I dunno, maybe the rock band did “Last Train to Clarksville.” The look and feel of the whole thing I remember being no more fraudulent, no more anti-life unwatchable, than anything else on TV at the time

— *Mod Squad, Star Trek, Ironside*...you've seen reruns, you know whatof I'm talkin'. Nixon was running for prez again then, and all these people, the musicians, the geezers, looked like they'd be voting for him — all except the tapdancer — 20-30 votes guaranteed. I'd like to be able to say I took acid to watch it, at least mescaline, but my girlfriend and I only smoked a small piece of hash.

Wait, oops — did I say 64? I must have got the digits reversed. (A natural mistake.) I'm 46. Which is old anyway. Hemorrhoids, skin cancer — the whole bit. I can't tell a 19-year-old anymore from a 32. No diff, and no jealousy, I hate today's "kids" anyway — talk about rings through the nose! (An old cuss.) Ain't been old for long, though. Like the first 17 years were what you call it. Infancy. Diaper time all the way. 25 years, a quarter century of active Youth, and I was finally a Grown-up at 42. Right on time, glad to be growed, but wouldn't ya know? — at 45 I was already Old. From maturity to dotage in a snap! And it don't come easy. Takes me FORTY TIMES AS LONG to write a paragraph — I figured this out — as when I was 30. I only beat off every *other* day. Need near-lethal doses of caffeine to start the engine...mid-day naps...lower back pain...upper back...sensitive to cold...hangovers get worse...can't see my hand in fronna my face...

I'm certainly closer to the End than even the Middle...or maybe my arithmetic is wrong. Dunno. In any event, I can say whatever I want about geezers. Call it self-hate. I'm allowed to hate myself. (Am I right or am I right?)

Color me Old but not my hair. 46 and I ain't grey yet — what's wrong with me? Should I maybe use talcum?

POSTCARDS OF WELKVILLE (1)

A road. A football-shaped green, green lawn. Distant and notso-distant green hills or mountains. Boring garden plants and stairs leading up to shingles or fake bricks or whatchacallems, light brown, crowned by four pointy roofs against a blue, blue sky. Sparse clouds. "Lawrence Welk Village Center Welcomes You to the Welk Theater Museum and Newly Opened Village Shops." For inst the shop wherein this very card was purchased, along with beer and sunscreen, and those in which golf tees, golf clubs, Welk-logo geezer hats and sweaters, ceramic ducks and eagles, and miniature souvenir accordions were displayed, seen, touched and in some instances gently mocked during our not much of a shopping spree between downpours, along with that touting the Resort Restaurant's "atmosphere of relaxed comfort" and "Tine food," before proceeding to said grubbery for Saturday lunch.

EXCELLENT AFFORDABLE GREASE

Most handicap parking spaces ever seen in one lot (although none is in use today).

DECOR: an interesting cross between “fine restaurant” and coffee shop. Vinyl-upholstered booths with “Rousseauian exotic” motif outlined in black Rapidograph. Pseudo-silver tableware — stainless steel in “classy” patterns just like “heirloom” silver in Your Own Home — but no cloth napkins. Different species of cloth and plastic flowers at every table. A real palm in a pot, reaching almost to the ceiling, an umbrella dangling from one of its lower spiky juts. Shamrocks on pinecones at the window — All Holidays Celebrated Here? The real Holiday Inn?

The joint is *clean* — similar in pervasiveness to Disneyland’s cleanliness-*is*-godliness number. A menial *carefully* spruces the metal outside a currently inactive fireplace.

FOOD (cheap): chicken burger — not a burger but a broiled breast w/ ham and Jack cheese — spiciest non-ethnic, non-barbecue chicken item I can remember eating — on a seeded kaiser roll (very fresh);

Primavera Omelette — fresh vegetables, cheese and spice — nutmeg? cumin? cayenne pepper? — interesting mix;

deep fried battered artichoke hearts — like great big bull’s balls—ultra-greasy w/ sour cream inside — *excellent* grease;

fries — crisp to the max — same fine grease.

CLIENTELE: party of ten including a couple in their 50s (others: 70-75) — guy and his wife look and act like a congressman & spouse from Missouri stumping for the Senior vote;

a disgruntled golf couple about 40 — colorful non-generic youthwear;

one golden ager with the same shoes as I got; an old codger with red-white-blue suspenders, pale blue bowling shirt, gaudy green cardigan — estimated age, 75-80 — one great hepcat ‘cept for his “born dead” 1930s look;

hardly anyone with a tan — either they’re from northerner climes or sunscreen use is now pandemic — these busters knew something ‘fore I did (less “C” than me!);

just as last night, everyone spiffed to the nines — no “vacation casual” for these folks — as fastidious (or more) about their time off as their time on.

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EXCITEMENT witnessed: two women, 25 and 75 — grandchild, presumably, and grandma. "But Mom says *you* love patty melts" —no go, she then suggests potato skins, no, soup — well, okay—"Low on the clams, please." Older woman is *stern*, uptumed-nose-y — or possibly just troubled by indigestion.

THE KNOWER AND THE KNOWN

Only between the common logic and my work there is this difference, that my question is, — what can we hope to achieve with reason, when all the material and assistance of experience is taken away?

—Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

Spicy food aside, this place is *bland*, daddy. So bland that it's difficult to really see much — "pay attention" — long enough to get a firm, functional read of any depth or import- especially re the particulars of explicit Human etcetera: a journalistic Black Hole. To adequately suss this biz out would require a real inclination to gawk and snoop, some genuine interest in all the faces and whatnot — both before the fact and by virtue of their fortuitous proximity — which is kind of hard to muster when the quarry truly *is* — on the surface of the surface of the surface — so bland. To peg these jackjills as *retired smalltown bankers (and their sewing-circle wives)*, or *neutered Republicans*, or *mega-squares w/out bite*, is patently unfair not because such characterizations might be subjectively "biased" — which of course they *are* — but because even insofar as they might in fact contain kernels of

“objective” truth they’re still only chickenshit “approximations”: as lame and hoky as the projected bottom line on any real-or-metaphoric hicks from the sticks (rubes from the cubes), as shallow and no-dimensional as can’t-think-of-the-metaphor. Hey, I’m lame, lazy, fuck me. But to actually poke beneath the surface, or even infiltrate prominent hatchmarks of surface, to “get real” about any of this...hey, Margaret Mead I’m not — sorry!

FORCE ME to look, however, to guess, and I’ll come up with SOMETHING. These are (by and large) a generally *robust* lot of old’uns we got here. Geographically, culturally, none among them could pass for the seed or the spawn of the Dust Bowl — except maybe foreclosing Dust Bowl bankers. Even if their having been bankers, and thus exercised power as an end in itself, is the reason/root/source/cause, most males do seem to behave as if still empowered (unlike some their age you might encounter who appear w/out enablement or decisiveness). In at least one crucial area, these people are not Disneyites — there’s alcohol everywhere. (So they’re not, arguably, anti-pleasure.) *When the music’s over, turn on the tap...*

THE THREE HILLS OF WELKVILLE

Harmony Hill...Melody Hill...Broadway Hill. Two of Music, one of Bigtime.

The sun at last emerging, we treat ourselves to a hike, a stroll, making use of our one-color complimentary map. Where to start...what to see...hmm...got it: the 9th Hole Snack Shop. ‘S always fun to see golfers get loaded. OK, that’s north, let’s see, take Lawrence Welk Drive to Camille to...

What th-? After not quite forty paces a guard gate halts our progress. Not the gate, the guard: a smiling bejeweled grandfatherly type like a town father on *The Andy Griffith Show*, someone who’d’ve offered Opie an apple for the answer to a tricky math problem, then withheld the goods, cackling, ‘Trust no one, my son, trust no one!’; different from the guests only in magnitude of jowls and the fact that for him there is no vacation, no moment’s respite, from the job of smile-driven intimidation. “This is time shares.” “Okay. Yeah.”

“Time shares.”

“Right. And we can’t look?”

“No — this is *private*. ”

Oh. The divine right of their class. Why not just mark the map with skulls & bones?

"You could walk over to the sales center and arrange a tour. They have them every —" Thanks — I'd rather walk my rat.

A last look at the map before tossing it in the wildflowers. On Broadway Hill: Brigadoon Villa...Oz Villa...Gigi Villa. On Melody Hill: Moonglow Villa...Tangerine Villa. On Harmony Hill: Memories Villa...Volare Villa. *This* is what they want from the rest of their lives???

SHAKESPEARE FARTS

The L.W. Resort Theatre presents: *Kiss Me Kate*, Cole Porter's immortal adaptation of the also immortal *Taming of the Shrew*. Former greats who have played here: Dorothy Lamour (*Barefoot in the Park*), Forrest Tucker (*Captain's Outrageous*). Lucky for me — lucky for us — I'll be attending with actress Gopi Montenegro (credits include: *On Golden Pond*, *Star Trek III*, *Driller Killer*), whose critique will be invaluable you can be sure.

But first, dinner — in Champagne Room #1. A full house, very full. Lots of San Diego Rotarians. At our table, a father-daughter combo from Point Loma discuss plays, (*Phantom*, *Les Miz*)...belly dancing...the Unknown Eater...noise from Lindbergh Field. Dad's seen the *Kiss Me Kate* movie with Kathryn Grayson and he can't recall the actor... was it Gordon MacRae?

ALL YOU CAN EAT, "...but the law requires you take a fresh plate each time": roast beef, lasagna, baked ham, mashed potatoes, rice, broccoli, cauliflower, rolls, champagne sherbet.

The 45th anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Peterson is announced, scattered applause, where are they? They don't stand, everybody looks around, wonders — maybe they're too old to stand. In the men's room, at adjacent urinals, one Rotarian to another: "There are some things *not* for public performance"...pause...he farts.

In the lobby before curtain: the fabulous exhibits of the Lawrence Welk Museum. Band photos like R. Crumb cartoons of fictional slicked-down bozos of yore; a band bus that looks more like a mobile beertruck home. The Champagne Ladies — Lois Best, 1938 (a hot one, didn't last long, did Mrs. Welk insist he bounce her?) — her successor (Jayne Walton) not nearly as hot. Re-pro of a poster for a show at Lake Okoboji, May '45 — "Look, Lois — Lake Okoboji!" A pair from Sioux City know the place. Actual poster from Ruthven, Iowa — Lawrence Welk and His Honolulu Fruit

Orchestra. The Farm Years — “Born March 11, 1903 in a sod farmhouse near Strasburg, North Dakota”...the Welks taught their 8 children “to work, to share, to love God — and to honor this country”...in 1920, his father bought him a \$400 accordion, which to pay off he had to work the farm till he was 21, meanwhile forking over all earnings from barn dances and weddings: a \$400 accordion?!! Which is like what— a \$10,000 ukelele today?

Curtain up, I'm game, but the play is just a blur, like a junior college version of Pirandello, a Neil Simon caught outdoors where every distant motorboat sound, every mosquito, is not only distracting but more interesting. I try to focus, to stay focused, but all I pick up is the snappy line “Brush up your Shakespeare, and the women you will wow.” The pit band consists of four pieces including synthesizer — Lawrence always had a *thing* about unions.

GOPI EVALUATES

Saturday night—why not?—neither of us has got AIDS that we know of, let's have sex. Okay. And then...

“That was *okay*, but there wasn't much ebb and flow. The sand and the sea is a good example — of the sea reaching out and licking the sand, *pulling* it into the sea, and the sand being part of the, as the wave retreats, okay, what happens is the sand is lying there, the wave gets *ready*, and as it's getting ready it pulls back, and when it pulls back it takes the sand with it as the wave builds its arc — this big arc. And then as it's pulling back it goes forward in this huge licking of the sea, well, splashing over into, this huge — I mean of the sand — this huge licking into the sand. This arc. And the sand is part of its identity — if it didn't have the sand it wouldn't have the pliability. It couldn't do this very well on rocks.”

“What does the sand do?”

“If the sand wasn't doing something, it wouldn't be there. Whatever it's doing — it's *there*. It's part of, it's all one. No, it's *not* passive. Did you ever feel the sand? Maybe it lies dormant until the sea comes along. When the sea comes, it lives with life, it vibrates with life — all the little particles, it *contributes* — the sea is doing it for the sand. The sand motivates the sea.”

“Didn't you ever see ocean hit rocks?”

“Yeah, it just goes off and goes away. It's nothing. It doesn't, the ocean does not have as good a time with the rocks. I'm telling you. Have *you* seen it? It just goes and

beats against it and goes back. I'm talking about the *communication* between the sand and the sea. The communication between the sand and the sea is *much* more special than the communication between the ocean and rocks — it is! The rocks just are immovable, they're not pliable. To have pliable sand is a *great* gift. If you could pull sand — just think of this as an analogy some time — if you were capable of taking sand and pulling it with that kind of power and then building at the same time and then splashing it — I mean that's quite a wonderful thing to be able to experience. I would think. Whereas if you're just splashing on rocks..."

"How about slamming in a pot of stew?"

"That's *nothing*. Richard, I'm talking about the beauty and the power of this kind of communication as opposed to just splashing pudding. I'm talking about a, you know, *heightened* experience."

"You seem to be talking about depths."

"No, I'm talking about the height of that wave. The higher the wave goes, the deeper the girl, uh, the experience."

"Girl is sand?"

"I would think, even though I think traditionally ocean is..."

"I think that's not politically correct."

"I don't know, because traditionally they've always said water is sexual, but I don't know if water is woman sexual. I don't know if it's politically correct or not. I'm just talking about *primal sexual feelings*. "

"Oh, it goes beyond politics?"

"No, I mean — yes, it does! In a way it's like the play if it had been done well. Y'know that's really, you could look at, the production we saw was really so horrible that you could see how bad the politics of the play were, are. But if that male character had been cast correctly and had sexual charisma and stuff, where you wanted it, then it would be a different story. I mean people would have all sorts of different feelings."

"But what you call sexual charisma might be what others would consider unacceptable male posturing."

"No, they *might* at the same time, but if it was cast, like for instance when they did *Taming of the Shrew* with Richard Burton —"

"What, you're saying everybody wants to fuck Richard Burton?"

"Well, I'm saying there are universals." "There *aren't* variants of macho behavior that are universally acceptable."

"I'm saying you can *only* get away with that if the person has got that kind, if there's that kind of *chemistry* involved."

"But it still has to be *acceptable*. It's not just that it's there."

"What do you mean by 'acceptable'?"

"The sand has to *want* it."

"Yes yes yes! Well that was the element —" "The sand might just say, 'Leave me alone.' " "Or beyond that, 'Leave me alone. I'm not at all attracted to you. I've got no need to be with you in any kind of way.' "

" 'I'd rather be sand in a pond with salamanders crawling around.' "

"Yeah, 'than be with you,' which is the case that it was in the play. But what I'm saying, if it was cast with a character that *did* have a complicated sense of, you know, that was, there was an attraction there, then it's a difficult issue. I guess what I mean, not politically acceptable but understandable, palatable."

"And by 'universal' you probably mean something like conventional, urn, conventional variables."

"Yes."

"Okay, and what if *still*, you're just sand on the bottom of a pond and you're used to it being quiet there, and you don't want storms stirring it up?"

"Well, you have that right."

"You have the right as *sand*?!"

"Yes! I'm talking about passion, though — passionate, passionate energy."

"Passionate sand!"

"Richard, I'm just using this analogy. I don't want you to use this in the piece."

"What piece?"

"Ha ha. Oh, I didn't *tell* you about this woman I met in the ladies' room after the play. She must've been 75, brown hair, 5' 1" or 5' 2", round but not exactly fat, fake eyelashes, very long and curled, she's putting on lipstick and she says, 'Colorful costumes, weren't they?' 'I guess so' — trying not to sound too enthusiastic. 'Did you like the show?' I tell her, 'I liked the *music*.' She tells me she saw it once before in Philadelphia. 'Oh, who with?' 'Alfred Drake.' 'Well, it *needs* an Alfred Drake. Somebody with some passion' — she doesn't know what I'm talking about. 'Well, he's a good actor.' "

"That was the third or fourth worst play I've ever seen."

"Well I don't think *Kiss Me Kate* is a bad play — I mean traditionally it's a bad play, it's from an era that, well — personally I was looking forward to seeing it, okay, because I knew exactly what it would be, and never in my wildest dreams did I expect it to have every ounce of fun drained out of it"

"What fun?"

"You see. that's the point, if it was cast well, if it was done well, you could enjoy these characters, there's the sexual thing, the songs, the stupid jokes, just for whatever it, as a relic from another — but you can only get away with that if it's cast well. It wouldn't have even been bad in terms of direction if everybody didn't suck, especially what's his, Petruchio. I suppose the acting is the director's responsibility, but these actors were so beyond it — nobody in this production had a clue. I suppose for a high school production it was okay, but even as that it was Ham City. While we were watching the play it felt like you had to imagine which members of the cast were related to the management, like of the theater, you know, the niece of someone — nobody could sing or dance except on the most mediocre of levels, they were all doing only what they were told to do. Like the lead woman did everything like 'Look at me. I'm doing it — I make this funny face, they laugh' — they were all very prideful that they were 'doing it right,' being prideful about the mediocrity. They manipulated with pride, that's what putting on a show is for them. As a professional, and I never look to see anything bad about fellow actors, say

anything. I'm sure they felt they did a good job — so their *standard* is wrong. Their idea of what is good is an extension of high school — actually children's — performance. It doesn't have to have reality, but it has to have some sort of truth to it. I mean these people could've been puppets. What made me feel sad was I don't think they know the difference."

"Was it all just *sand*?"

"Yeah, I guess, if you want, but you have to have both. I suppose if you only have one — sand...you know what aspect was missing in the analogy? The moon. You know how the moon pulls the tide?"

"Yeah."

"And there's a force that is bigger than the sea or the sand, so the sand, the tide, the moon makes the force — there was no moon in this play. I guess you could call the director the moon. He wasn't very much of a moon."

FEAR OF MUSIC

Lawrence and Fern are bursting with pride these days and well they might! Their beautiful little great-granddaughter Kate Elizabeth is giving indications that she might turn out to be a musician! Says Lawrence, "I just love this picture of her sitting at the piano. She's about 7 months old here, all dressed up to go to a costume party. None of our other children or grandchildren showed much interest in music, but judging by this picture, perhaps our little Katie will carry on the musical tradition. And wouldn't that be nice!"

— *The Lawrence Welk Show Musical Family News*, spring quarter '92

Where one culture uses as a main thread the vulnerable ego. quick to take insult or perish of shame, another selects uncompromising bravery and, so that there may be no admitted cowards, may like the Cheyenne Indians invent a specially complicated social position for the overfearful.

— Margaret Mead, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*

What's *this* — "POPULAR TV BANDLEADER DIES AT 89"?!? —fuh. Shit. It takes weeks, sometimes months, to write these things, you know. (Spend too much time selecting epigraphs, and next thing you know you're writing epitaphs.) I'm not gonna go back and revise, though. I'm almost done. You want tenses changed, you want a less mocking tone (out of respect for etc.)—*you* change it. You be the author, it's okay with me.

I'll just come to terms, right here, right now, with the dead man's music. None of which was in the air during my two nights and a day at his resort.

Like there were big absurd bronzes of him conducting, silly shrines with quarter notes and G-clefs, an entire bandstand — with instruments — reconstructed in the museum...so many references to music: why no music? The only sounds at all were in the lounge, the play — all non-Lawrence. No music on the grounds, at the check-in, none in the museum, the shops...hardly an ambient peep...the whole place was *really* quiet. Hmm.

Theories? Perhaps, as God's was for Meister Eckhart, the Welk oeuvre's presence may in fact have been in its absence. I.e., the quiet somehow was Lawrence. To wit: the man's music, by acclamation sonically "harmless" — non-assaultive — was as hazardous and compelling as vanilla pudding. Anything therefore *less* assaultive, i.e., tending functionally towards silence, would be at least as acceptable—and possibly more so. (Theory #1: *Turn it down.*)

While at the resort, however, I picked up a copy of *Lawrence Welk Live at Lake Tahoe* (Ran-wood RC-10001), which having since played I find *not* harmless — far from it — my life feels at serious jeopardy as I listen and take notes. Guy & Rona's cloying version of "You Light Up My Life" is like a duet between Linda Ronstadt and the partner she's no doubt been waiting (if not praying) for, the one and only Pat Boone. Joe Feeney's "Who Can I Turn To?" has all the spine-tingling excitement of a performance by, say, Dennis Day. Emotionally, sexually neutered, as a singer he makes Sting — Jerry Vale — Doublemint commercials — seem expressive and mammalian by comparison. Semantically neutered: Kathie Sullivan's read on "The Way We Were" as a — no joke — "happy" song. Arthur Duncan tapdancing to "Wait 'til the Sun Shines, Nellie"...the frog-voice bathos of Larry Hooper... Basically, this is music by and for people who don't even *shit*.

Which doesn't maybe assault some people who do, maybe *some* indeed are "comforted" by it, but sheez — I find it excruciating. (Vanilla pudding with razor blades.) Look, I'm not claiming "universality" for my own squalid taste, but if I respond that way, others can and may as well. (Anything's possible.)

Giving rise to Theory #2: a certain percentage of the Welk audience finds the music as troubling as I do — a minority, let's say. of husbands, wives, family members otherwise along for the extended Welk "trip." The Welk organization knows this — that while some may harbor Welk values in general, they can't hack the music nohow — so to avoid taking any chances, to be demographically safest, there is simply no Welk music at the resort. (Theory #2: *Turn it off.*)

Although maybe, a further listen tells me, it isn't even *music*. It evinces nothing, after all, re the physics of feeling and sound, it *aspires* to evince nothing, and by nothing I mean less than Wayne Newton's does, than Liberace's did ...*that* kinda nothing: nothing without even the resonance of nothinghood. It isn't "bad" music — it's simply not music.

So many genres are namedropped — "Hawaiian music," "Irish music," "Latin," "Dixieland," "disco," "country music," "film music," even "nostalgia" — but none're actually delivered, *performed*, with a commitment, a vigor, that might — even as concept — differentiate one from another. Everything, by design, is attenuated, weakened, to the point of being but a neutral component in what..."One Music"..."World Music"? No: Homeopathic Music! (Microdilution with ground-zero overkill.)

Heck, the motherlode of this is Amateur Night at the O.K. Corral — Joe Blow trumpeting the legs out from under "You Made Me Love You"; Jacques Bag o' Donuts frothing up "La Vie en Rose"; the Jill St. Cardboard Singers whining a soggy path through "Cottonfields" — which might (with luck) be its only saving grace, its one true shot at being Music at all, of being about Accident even if by accident — but it's polished and *perfected* amateur night, amateur drained of its innocence and working for scale. Amateur cut to size, mounted, and nailed to the wall, which all but eviscerates that possibility.

At its most arch, its most "successful," this is produce handcrafted as if for doting grandparents by favored grandchildren ("Ooh...how beautiful!"), as if no element or aspect could matter beyond its being by-the-numbers dealt and done with. The polar opposite of something created and lived like "your life" — or anything — "depended on it," it's over before it's over, long before it's even begun: no present-tense being, no musical *now*, no *potential* musical now — or musical ever.

PLUS: for that segment of the audience (and, who knows, maybe the band itself) for whom virtually *all* music qua music is the devil's handiwork — naughty stuff! — smart demographics would again dictate playing it safe, deftly subjecting all parties concerned to No Music.

And the closest space-time counterpart to this non-music, this nothing, is the non-music, the nothing, of the Lawrence Welk Hotel/Resort itself — natch — independent of all external sonic considerations. Already the bleeping EPITOME of non-music, it surely needs no sonic non-music, no musical non-music, to bolster its “case.” The foundations of Welkhood require no such gratuitous reinforcement. (Theory #3: *Don't bother — no need — to even in the first place turn it on.*)

Anyone's death leaves a wake — no pun intended — of silence. Lawrence of Strasburg's death leaves us with
10,000,000,000,000,000.000,000,000,000,000,000 units of SILENCE....SILENCE
MUFFLED...NOTHING (NOT EVEN SILENCE OR MUFFL

POSTCARDS OF WELKVILLE (2)

Lawrence (in closeup) between two tree trunks in a bright red synthetic-fabric shortsleeve shirt, white lace-up front, white trim on collar and cuffs, wide white belt holding up what look like red and blue floral-pattern pants, a 5-iron sticking into frame like a bent metallic dick, inane “can't keep it down” smile not quite snappy or complacent enough to be labeled fatuous, photo posed in (a good guess) early '70s.

In the course of my now concluding search, I have learned nothing new from this gentleman about growing old, or being dead. I'm a slow learner...but *c'mon*.

Once cardboard-in-flesh, now a thinner paper product minus all corporeal intimation, this dozo's graceless bub-strut is NO MORE.

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I pause to think about how much of a staple these things have been in my life.

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Best Of

Every book and movie about boxing

Where boxing as we know it went WRONG — a good e-z first guess would be the first *Rocky* film

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Nov. 1, 1990](#)

Sports

Hi, howya, come in, lemme show ya something. From a tan glueless envelope, ½ square, the kind used for storing stamps, coins, and various other miniature collectibles, he removes a speck of hard white paint no larger than a fennel seed: I peeled this off of "Guernica," you know the Picasso painting, the big one? Museum

of Modern Art, New York, they had it for a while. I waited till the guard was turned away, then I went up and — that? The gold record? 'S for some old, some junk I wrote in another life, dunno why it's still hang — lookit this. Robert Rauschenberg, y'know his assemb, those construction things? It's from that great one with . the stuffed goat and the tire, nobody guards art-things like that, not well, a clump of goathair, I just pulled it off. An' lookit this art-thing...



MEANING: look LOOK [I wanna be in your pants... live in your pants... eat, drink, sleep, suck and fuck in your pants; meanwhile] lookit this art-thing. It's how I start them off — gals who were born to love me — an hors d'oeuvre before the main showandtell, one that never fails to show th'm what a uniquely intriguing sonofagun I am, after which they're *mine*. After the boxing.

... a Marisol, one of those huge doll-things she did with the, this was ribbon on one of her doll-things. End art. Begin boxing. Benny "Kid" Paret, first man ever to step in a ring champion and leave dead, actually it was a week later but he really — see these holes? — even the poster has stigmata. It was nailed to a wall outside the Garden, the old Garden when it was at 49th and 8th, you been to New York? West Side. Midtown. Sixty-two, March 24, March is a big death month, I was in high school. I even have his blood on a program somewhere. With nervous, hasty effort he dislodges boxes, crates from an overstuffed closet: the "stash."

Here. I was all the way up, the rafters, when the stretcher guys, they carried him out and I ran down, on the press table, some reporter left it, right under Benny's corner. Just this one dried spot, but it's kind of a perfect little circle [gimme gimme good LOVIN'], the splash marks are like sunrays or something. And here [baby], Ring Magazine [BABY!], August '49, Jake LaMotta wins the middleweight, you saw Raging Bull? "Title Regained by U.S.," that's as far as, Jake wasn't too popular with, he's not even on the cover.

From a box within a box, from which all Mike Tyson-related items have been banished (bad for the showtell: he beats women), a whole array of dandy little cutesos, the kind women love, are then drawn. Thumb-sized gloves, complete with padding and laces, from the nineteen twenties. Buttons. Abe Attell. *Featherweight champ, later he was bag-man for what's his, fixed the 1919 World Series.* Thmi Mauriello. *Knocked out by Joe Louis, one round, I wonder if it's from before or after.* Boxing cards from 1910, IV2" x 3", edges slightly worn but images unmarked, bright, chroma far higher than in inks in similar use today. Honey Mellody. *Welterweight they spelled him wrong, should be two L's [take my log, take it!], a real pretty card.* Pale green arena backdrop with spotlights fuzzy/furry like a Monet cathedral. Knockout Brown. *He was cross-eyed, says bantamweight here but he was bigger, a lightweight, never a champ, doesn't he look saintly?* Young Nitchie. *Never heard of him.* Cards from the early fifties.

Eugene Hairston. *A marginal contender, middleweight, "Drives a special make of car for deaf mutes," nice to know [are you wet yet?].* Matchbook, stirrer, and

promotional sugar cube from Jack Dempsey's (1619 Broadway, CO 5-7875).
Wrapper from a d-Con roach trap with the image of Muhammad Ali making a fist. *My all-time culture hero, last of the fighter-saints...*

This part always gets them.

...like before TV all fighters were holy, they without reservation put their brains and their looks on the line, and their eyes, both kindsa looks. But All was so supreme, so beyond physical vulnerability, that he had to, in order to complete his boxing cycle and enter the pantheon, y'know, his way, he had to end up more brutalized than Louis or Sam Langford or — he had to, after his reflexes started going in his mid thirties, after the third Frazier fight [I love you!], he had to risk going brain-dead like any clubfight bum played by Maxie Rosenbloom. 'Cause he didn't need the money, he wasn't broke, or any additional boxing-historical accomplishments, all that was left was to go punchy himself and I think it was willful, on a more than deathwish level — especially the Holmes fight — an extremely spiritual (boxing qua boxing) type of... And if that doesn't work I go with my capsule history of the heavyweight division.

Of which there are two versions — long and short. Usually I do the short. *John L. Sullivan, "The Great John L.," was the last of a long line of bareknuckle champs. The Queensberry rules came in — gloves, three-minute rounds, ten count — and after winning that title he pretty much ignored it, fought a little without gloves, including a 75-rounder there 're actually photos of, but mostly he just drank and didn't train and in 1892 he lost, with gloves, to Jim Corbett, "Gentleman Jim," Erroll Flynn played him, William Frawley was his manager. It's hard to know beyond the myth if he in fact was any good, a prototype maybe of a more mobile sort of boxer (as opposed to just a puncher) than the times were used to, anyway in his second defense he got beat by an overgrown middleweight, not even overgrown, in the 160's, Bob Fitzsimmons, who knocked him out with a solar plexus punch. And I check her plexus (and want it) and her belly and her knees and her feet and I'm swaying as I'm talking and my talk momentum and my sexurge momentum are just going going and the sex adrenalin and the talk adrenalin and the wine adrenalin conspire and compel me to CONTINUE.*

Jim Jeffries. Marvin Hart. Tommy Burns. Jack Johnson. Jess Willard. Jack Dempsey. Gene Tunney. Max Schmeling. Jack Sharkey. Primo Camera. Max Baer. And for some reason, I don't know why, I occasionally get stalled or stuck at Jimmy Braddock. That Irish fighter. Unemployed longshoreman. North Bergen, New Jersey. And while I'm stalled I let her get a word in edgewise. How's work? Seen any movies? (Fine. Great.) I resume. I finish.

And if that fails there's always my jazz show & tell.

FISTS OF PULP — What I don't show 'em, hardly ever, is books. Books are too unshowy, even most covers. Books are private. I might gesture at my 17 volumes of *The Ring Record Book*, their pure bulk 'n' sweep across an entire bookshelf, but I'm not gonna grab one, scan alphabetically and show 'em — prove to 'em — "See — Jack Johnson *did* fight Battling Siki in Montreal, no, Quebec City, 1923, though it's listed as just an 'exhibition' " — stuff like that's too arcane for courtship, too arcane for anything but arcanery. Most of all, books (qua books) are slow. Slow on the inhale, slow in real-time buzz. They're not real-time documents — real-time "text" — like mags, programs, cards, and such. What they're documents of is what all books are documents of: contextual disjuncture, publishers' folly.

In English alone, going all the way back to the first bound volume of Pierce Egan's *Boxiana* (1813), there have seemingly been thousands of boxing books, some number, let's say, between four thousand and ten, hardcover and/or soft, running the gamut from major publisher to vanity press. I would bet it's at least three thousand, okay, 2500. I own, and have read, about a hundred. As long as you're here, I might as well tell you 'bout all of them, or most of them, or some of them, starting with three of them: the v. best. Head and shoulders, arms and navel above the rest, let's get this over with, are Peter Heller's *In This Corner...!*, A.J. Liebling's *The Sweet Science*, and *The Fireside Book of Boxing* (ed. by W.C. Heinz).

These are great books, pretty much equally great — I would hafta flip coins to come up with a preferential sequence. Okay, Liebling. Here's a guy who could actually write (food, war, "social history"), write his way out of select wet paper bags (no mean feat), and what we've got of him here is like 18 boxing pieces written for *The New Yorker* from '51 to '55, almost great years for boxing (Marciano, Robinson, Louis's twilight) but even if not he'd've covered them great. More than most know — its you'll run across, this is one such who can really *explain* fights: fights and the laws of physics, fights and the forces of history, fights and random chance — but his true forte is fighters. Doesn't matter if he's profiling a heavyweight contender or some dipshit lightweight from Rhode Island — the outcome is always conspicuously *interesting*, and not in a Capote-covers-Brando ("Look ma, I'm making art of trash!") sort of way... never for a sec do you get the feeling he's slumming.

'S possible these are the best things I've seen that could pass for conventional journalism, and Liebling doesn't waste his time (or yours) shunting the "I" to another

room like so many tightassed conventional in search of "objectivity," His fat presence is in fact a crucial part of the show: "I went to Syracuse, frankly, because I hoped Graham might have learned enough about Vejar to have a plan for taking the youthful bounce out of him; emotionally, I long ago moved over to the middle-aged side of the field, and I root for mature judgment when pitted against the outrageous fortunes of chronology." It might even still be in print.

The Fireside Book isn't, however, too bad. This fatfat smallprint collection from '61 contains a heap of goodstuff, fine amazing shit like Jack London's racist account of the Johnson-Jeffries fight ("And the carefree Negro smiled and smiled"); Nellie Bly's discussion of sweaters with John L. Sullivan; a '39 Liebling profile of one of Louis's sparring partners; the single greatest boxing piece of all time, Dan Parker's dadaistic (per se) "I Went to See Tony Galento"; references to boxing in three of Plato's dialogues; John Lardner's homage to Doc Kearns's rape of Shelby, Montana, before, during, and after the Dempsey-Tommy Gibbons fight; Al Laney's tear-your-heart-out weeper about the blind Sam Langford; "Fifty Grand," one of Hemingway's hokier stories (this guy intends to throw a fight on which he's bet against himself, only his opponent has the same idea, ha, so they end up trading low blows — back when refs still fell for such biz and disqualified people — and whichever guy ultimately hits the other one harder in the balls, harder enough to make him admit to having been fouled, loses, i.e., wins — gee how *macho*)] transcriptions of rounds 1 and 13 of Don Dunphy's blow-by-blow of the first Marciano-Walcott fight. A lot of selections, especially the "high booty" items, seem directly copped from William Cox's 1935 anthology, *Boxing in Art and Literature*, but in many cases Heinz has opted for less abridged versions (Plato; George Borrow's *Lavengro*) and/or snappier translations (the boxing scene from Hugo's *The Man Who Laughs*) — bully for him.

And ditto for Peter Heller — double ditto. (Triple.) Eighteen years after publication, his out-of-print masterwork remains the towering achievement of boxing oral history. Subtitled *Forty World Champions Tell Their Stories*, it reads like boxing's own show and tell, a barely edited (thankgod) 400-page rant in real rant form and time — run-on sentences! hold that syntax! dig th' proluxity! — I only wish all the *ums*, *uhs*, *y'knows* had been left intact. Says ex-middleweight kingpin Joey Giardello, f'r inst, speaking of Ray Robinson: "When Dick Tiger said he was going to fight the winner, then he would fight me. He fought me because Tiger was going to fight the winner for the title. That's the only reason he would fight me. But when he was champion he'd never fight me. When it got to the point where he wanted another shot at the title, then he decided he'll fight me" — which reads as slow, real, and stoopid as dialogue from *Raging Bull*. Speaking of which, LaMotta's in here, sounding a damn sight realer and aliver than he does as narrator of *Raging Bull* the book (one's own voice — none of this "as told to" crap — 'll do it), delivering the equivalent of his

shitty, embarrassing standup act from the post-jail, Fat Jake part of the film ...'s really nice.

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And it isn't just the ostensibly *likable* ex-pugs who come off sounding/smelling groovy: the Archie Moores, the Willie Peps, the Dempseys. Even fighters I've never especially liked, guys I wouldn't otherwise give two shits in hell for as icons or recollected real-time ephemeras — Don Jordan, dickhead Gene Fullmer, Jack Sharkey — manage to transcend their wretchedness-as-dealt simply by being bulk-verbal: each a massive *who*, finally, to go with its corresponding massive *what*. For me, that is, don't know 'bout you, this book works in fact like a floating ad hominem: boxers qua boxer... all saints, all verbal... all their saintwords *play*. Or am I just a sap for bulk sainthood? Dunno. (Steal a copy from the library.)

THE BEAT GOES ON — Compared to the whore genre of all whore genres, the rock book — write one, plagiarize one, or scribble the goddam captions for one, you're a rockwriter (one wd.), automatic and forever — it's rare for a boxing book alone to confer on its author the badge/nametag/credential of boxing writer. Rare? Well, right now I can't think of any. The best: you've gotta know the turf, pound a beat, have a boxing-based reporterly gig, which doesn't mean you by any stretch of etc. mus' be good — it merely means you've been forcibly wed to the ebb & flow of the beast for however many years on at least a regional level. On the other hand, since pounding out periodic copy takes time — is their fulltime *job* — few credentialed beaters ever find the time, even in a lifetime, not to mention the stamina, to specifically pump out bound copy that ain't just thinly veiled (fleshed out) compilation. Of the following quintet of beatbooks — two by ordinaries, two by swells, one by an opportunist asshole — only two, far as can be guessed, were totally writ as books... and maybe not even.

Ordinary #1. Ralph Wiley's *Serenity*. An assortment of midsize pieces from *Sports Illustrated* and the *Oakland Tribune* serve as fodder for an extended take on the theme of peace-o-mind among athletes, in particular boxers. A red herring if ever there was one: fistic serenity, it turns out, equals brain damage (how sad, gulp, how troo). Some grievous factual errors (Thomas Hearns kayoed Duran in the second round, not the first; Ezzard Charles was once heavyweight champion, never lightheavy; Spinks took Ali's title in the former's 8th pro fight, not his 14th) make for winceful reading, but at least the author is historically kind to the too oft underrated Larry Holmes.

John Schulian, *Writers' Fighters and Other Sweet Scientists*. A fight writer since the mid 70s for four different dallies, this guy is generally weak on major figures, and very wrong about some (calling Ray Leonard, the most stylistically derivative dipshit of the last forty years, "as original as anyone who ever laced on boxing gloves"), but he's one funny, compassionate bloke when it comes to marginal riffraff and sleaze (heavyweight stumblebum Ron Stander; Baltimore promoter Ali Hanover). Columnist-glib, occasionally he gets off a good one: "You think something is the end of the world, and thirty years later it's a story to be told at homecoming."

A notch up or thirty is *McIlvanney on Boxing*, an almost (at times) Lieblingesque heap o' stuff from the '60s to the '80s by a bearable Brit, Hugh McIlvanney, not to be confused with Hugh McElhenny. His boxing-historical eye is usually on the dime (an un-self-revised, ongoingly "correct" appreciation of Ali's career — highly uncommon for someone who was actually there covering it from its near-inception), though his unit focus is sometimes suspect (too generous to the Great White Dope, Gerry Cooney, whose "spirit [versus Holmes] never faltered," whose heart "was too brave to have any truck with his hopeless predicament in that thirteenth round"). In any event, *good prose*, not unreadable, "hard to put down." Does a good job on the Lupe Pintor-Johnny Owen fight, which I too was at, the second (and still counting) deathfight of my own live-attendance career.

Barney Nagler's *James Norris and the Decline of Boxing* is a damngood, verygood, possibly even greatgood secret history of boxing from the mid '30s to the late '50s, early '60s. On a factual level alone, there's a shitload of fine meat here — Goebbels's role in the negotiations for a Schmeling-Braddock fight that never came off; the accounting scam by which Joe Louis was screwed out of millions by the International Boxing Club; Cus D'Amato's diligence as bag man for the International Boxing Guild; the exact words (from wiretap transcriptions) used in passion by the pus and scum that *specifically* controlled boxing from such year to such year. What's more, real events have real life, their players have size, shape and clout — they really step out and *play*. "Underworld" muh-fuh Frankie Carbo is described as resembling "nothing so much as a Madagascan aye-aye whose nocturnal habits he surpassed with a determination bordering on a total abhorrence of daylight." Promoter Mike Jacobs, conventionally tabbed "the colorful Mike Jacobs" or "crafty Mike Jacobs," appears here as "a ruthless and arrogant dictator, perhaps the most ruthless and arrogant the business of sports promotion has known" — 35 years before Don King. (And he isn't even as nasty or scummy as the titular hub of the book.)

A frigging master at cataloguing and telegraphing fixes and dives, at tablesetting an omnipresent *atmosphere* of fixes and dives, Nagler is the only writer [of all those I've

read] capable of generating doubt about the authenticity of any and all ring "results," even those whose authenticity has always been taken for granted; he's also capable of making those surface aspects of boxing over which there can and will *never* be empirical doubt seem secondary to other, more significant, boxing "themes." When pressing such buttons he vividly reminds us that the "primary text" of boxing (the steady gestalt of fights-as-fought plus hype plus coverage) is already a gross distortion of you-name-it, that "boxing history" at its *most functional* is never any more (any less) than a grand conglomeration of such distortions. For eschatological resonance alone, this bk. is superior to any gangster film that has yet been shot, or any gangster novel with the exception of Nick Tosches' *Cut Numbers*. I should probably add it to my top three.

That *The Ring* – *Ring* magazine – "The Bible of Boxing" – is mentioned in it only once prob'ly says much about the mag's ultimate value as text, as textualizer, as cipher (i.e., virtually none). With that in mind, *50 Years at Ringside*, a '58 memoir by its imperious founder and shaper, Nat Fleischer, is perhaps best approached as the fatuous yowling of ringside journalism's one true Ozymandias, now dust (his worms dust too). "I have been on intimate terms with every heavyweight champion since James J. Corbett," boasts he – goody gumdrops – yet he scarcely was more than a lifetime shill (on a par with Ted Koppel or Leonard Feather), a shill (for preferred manipulators) as opposed to groupie (for mere fighters) – he always had an ax in someone's fire. Great moments in conflict of interest: the time he got Garden matchmaker Tom McArdle to do *The Ring's* monthly ratings – "[He] seemed an obvious choice because he had to be fully informed concerning boxers in all classes all over the world" – this from the guy who essentially invented top-ten rankings – nice to see 'twas never too diff from the weaslehump heatdream of the WBC and WBA.

Fleischer's own all-time top tens, meanwhile, are a tad heavy, pardon th' pun, on antediluvian types (Owen Moran as #3 lightweight, Tammy Ryan as #2 middleweight, Mysterious Billy Smith as #2 welter), and his pick for all-time "best knockout puncher," bodypoking Bob Fitzsimmons, may well lead one to ask, *Like uh WHUH??* "I do not believe in the past," explains Nat, "but I do believe that the romance of the prize ring rests almost entirely in the years gone by [which I, ahem, remain the only livingbreathing chronicler of so kiss my tush]." More armed-forces than thou *well* before spanking Ali by rescinding "recognition" of his claim to the title, he lets us know in passing he spared "no expense... to see that the men [in uniform] received what they cherished most in reading matter – boxing news" ... let's piss on his grave.

THE OUTSIDE DOPE – Okay. Then there's these people who ain't boxing writers, who verymuch ain't boxing writers, who wouldn't be boxing writers if you gave 'em 80 years to play with and a swimming pool, but who, being writers, being *book* writers, insist at some point on trying their hand at a "major" boxing book. Hey, it's a free etcetera.

Heading the list, natch, is George Plimpton, the outsider's outsider, who hasn't known or cared dick about *most* of what he's written about, so why — indeed — not boxing? His '77 *Shadow Box*, a "participatory" whoozis in the tradition of *Paper Lion*, wherein he pretended to play football — here he pretends to box Archie Moore — is a tough read from the getgo, unless, that is, you can live with expressions like "a pair of underwear shorts" and lines like "I had been introduced to him by Ernest Hemingway, who always spoke of him with the highest regard." Indeed.

Not too much better is *The Fight*, a facile treatise on Ali vs. George Foreman, the original "rope a dope" fight, by the emperor's new clothes of American letters, Norman Mailer. With even less irony than is normally his wont, he piles macho cliché upon macho cliché, saying little about boxing that he couldn't (and wouldn't) say with equal inflection about fucking or war, but there is this one okay sequence where he actually describes every significant punch of the fight — how it looks, what it does, what it *means* — he must've replayed it on an early VCR. A piece of fluff on the order of his *Marilyn* book, minus the photos.

The guy who wrote *Missing*, Thomas Hauser, has this other one, *The Black Lights*, which isn't half bad. A paean to boxing-writ-large occasioned by three months spent with junior welterweight champion Billy Costello in '84, it's got possibly the most consistently nongratuitous boxing quotes — from interviews, newstext, press releases, etc. — I've seen throughout a single volume. Details Gerry Cooney's swinishness with more verve and veracity than most writers of the time. A little gosh-oh-gee in spots, but what the hey.

Take a copy of Joyce Carol Oates's *On Boxing*, its excellent paper, fine typeface and photos; hold firmly. With a felt-tip marker, some dark opaque color, black, blue, or green, inscribe on the cover: THIS BOOK STINKS. On the title page: KEEP IT. Dogshit book! Worst "serious" work I have read on the subject, like there've gotta be some silly little bios you could find that might be worse, but this one aims high — and misses by the radius of Jupiter. Even when she lucks upon the "truth" — and never is it more than truism — Oates's prose is so goddam dreary it's excruciating. Drearier than some quack M.D. whizzing out a ban-boxing number for *Reader's Digest* —and she "loves" boxing. As dreary as death.

Amateur boxwriting; amateur boxing. *Buttercups and Strong Boys*. William Plummer, author of *The Holy Goof: A Life of Neal Cassady*, spends a year, two years, I forget, with a bunch of kids and their trainers preparing for the New York Golden Gloves. One of these finger-snappers who use journalism as a means of meeting some rilly inneresting characters, he namedrops Thales and tells you early '30s bantamweight Panama Al Brown defended his crown "twenty-odd times without a setback" — the number is ten. (One of his characters must've told him that.)

TWO JAKES, SIX ROOKIES — Best thing about *Raging Bull* the book is the pics — not in the movie-edition paperback, only the 70 hardcover — of Jake LaMotta and his second missus, Jake and the kids, fat Jake with his kids (one fat) and the missus on Miami-upholstered furniture, fat Jake with a cigar, Jake with Joe Louis, etc. Look at these pics and you know where Scorsese got his film — they're the screaming *generatrix* of it — after which he could prob'ly've got by without reading the thing, they supply that much meat. He did, though, and luckily ignored its cornball causality (Jake thinks he once killed this guy he was hired to lean on, punishment lurking 'round every bend though he'd merely knocked him senseless — that's why he's so *driven*). He also takes Jake's father's parental sadism and transposes it to Jake's brother, who otherwise is mostly a composite of the brother and co-author Peter Savage — little crucial adjustments like that. Which is not to say the book itself's no good — it's okey doke.

Raging Bull II, meantime, is a strange mutha, one of the few books you'll see where the principal name, the draw, is down in the *with* section — it's by Chris Anderson & Sharon McGehee. Jake only appears in Ist-person strut in chapters 1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 23, and each reappearance feels like "Heeeeere's Jakey!" Reads in places like a sequel to the Jim Norris book, especially Jake's evasive testimony on the Billy Fox dive (followed by a fantasy of him fucking Mrs. Carbo on the plane back from testifying). Four Mrs. LaMottas after number two are mentioned, and three are pictured.

Somebody Up There Likes Me, by Rocky Graziano with Rowland Barber, is a mid-'50s classic, on a par with *Peyton Place* and *Gidget*, "uplifting" enough to make junior high reading lists. Real nice chaps. on his deserting the army. Its belated sequel, the '81 *Somebody Down Here Likes Me Too*, has the Rock's earthly pusbuddy Ron Reagan on the cover, and it gets dumber from there. Co-author Ralph Corsel's overzeal in making Rocky sound "natural" reads like a Joel Chandler Harris (Lord Buckley) dialect joke, but its scatterbrained meander is at times almost appealing, and the "me and Frank and Dean" paesan bullshit does, in the end, read as if truly spoke by a frigging innocent.

Written within a couple years of Rocky Marciano's death in a '69 plane crash, Bill Libby's *Rocky: The Story of a Champion* has the look and flavor of a quicky. So boring, apparently, was this Rock's central life, however, that *Rocky Marciano: Biography of a First Son*, a multi-year labor of love by Everett M. Skehan ("with the family assistance of Louis, Peter, and Mary Anne Marciano"), supplies us with little more in the way of pertinent hoohah, fattening up mainly on the specifics of his retirement, his eating habits, his cheapskatishness and possible adulteries. Both authors share the dogma that while R.M. may or may not've been the greatest heavyweight of all time — which he fucksure wasn't — at the very least he was the most devastating heavyweight puncher — which he wasn't either. What he was was a tough, clumsy white champ, following three consecutive black champs, who got fat during one of the thinnest periods in heavyweight history.

Boxing has had other prominent Rockies than Graziano and Marciano — Rocky Kansas ('20s lightweight), Rocky Castellani ('50s middleweight), Rocky Randall ('50s lightweight), Rocky Kalingo ('50s/'60s welterweight) — and it's to all these jokers, all possible these's, that Bay Area neo-beat Gary Blackman dedicates his '76 collection, *Rocky Poems*, released a good six months before *Rocky* the film — no opportunist, he! Fun stuff.

If you had to pinpoint the point where boxing as we know it went WRONG — in the way it's wrong today — a good e-z first guess would be the first Rocky film. Not only is it the crummiest boxing film ever, with the possible exceptions of the Rocky sequels and the remake of *The Champ*, but this gross distortion of life, of everything pugilistically whole and holy, combined (fuggit) with the rise and reign of Mr. Made-for-TV himself, Sugar Ray Leonard, has gone a long, terminal way towards making even the surface of boxing a major Living Lie. In *The Official Rocky Scrapbook*, major culprit Sly Stallone says he based Rocky Balboa on Chuck Wepner ("The Bayonne Bleeder!"), a bum w/out a single redeeming feature, w/out in fact too many *features*... which is all, I guess, we really needed t' know.

CELLULOID SOCK — Thanks to TV, Sly et al, A equals not-A, first principle of American sports hype since time im., no longer requires the elaborate sleight of hand it used to, anything can be sold as its opposite, easy, but bums, basically, is still bums, at least bums *qua* bums is — a message Fat City, that most naturalistic of box films (tied w/ *Raging Bull* for best box film, period), spares no show and tell in showtelling you. Vivid bum stuff in Stockton. Leonard Gardner wrote it, keeping most scuzz intact from *Fat City* his novel, which has this one additional scene, though, where the younger of the two main bums, Ernie, gets dumped from a ride by these two broads he thought he could fuck hitching home from a bloody fight in Utah. Nice ending.

Nice ending too to *The Harder They Fall*, Budd Schulberg's roman a clef on the career of Primo Camera, far better'n that of his screenplay for the film, Humphrey Bogart's last, which is basically alright until it gets goody-goody. Original ending is much, y'know, stronger: no "clean up boxing" treatise by the sportswriter; the beaten fighter he's helped exploit regards him as the same shit as the rest, which he is; split from his wife, he slips sullen pork to she-who-sleeps-only-with-losers.

Another mostly okay flic is *The Set-Up*, lifted loosely from a late-'20s novel-in-verse by Joseph Moncure March. Biggest diff is the poem's protagonist is black (thus unplayable by Robert Ryan), an homage to Tiger Flowers, who had by the time of publication won and recently lost the middleweight title, the first black to do so, and was soon to die during fight-related eye surgery: "Pansy had the stuff, but his skin was brown; And he never got a chance at the middleweight crown."

Not so OK is the *Bird* of boxing, *The Great White Hope*, a bland see-Spot-run version of Howard Sackler's see-Spot-run play, an attempt in wds., set, and blocking to capture the full flaming essence of Jack Johnson ("Jefferson"), a one-man force of nature, "larger than life," certainly larger than this play.

Pete Hamid's cheesy *Flesh and Blood*, filmed as a TV miniseries, has only one thing going for it: an acceptance of the fact that to be successful anymore, a white heavyweight must be a *motherfucker*, which Bobby Fallon, son of Kate, explicitly, literally is.

King Creole, Elvis's fourth movie, is Harold Robbins's A Stone for *Danny Fisher* with singing instead of boxing, moved to New Orleans from New York. Both are warmed-over shit.

64 WORDS ABOUT 32 BIOS & AUTOS -

Muhammad Ali with Richard Durham, *The Greatest: My Own Story*. Not great.

Gerald Astor, " ...And a Credit to His Race": *The Hard Life and Times of Joseph Louis Barrow*, a.k.a. Joe Louis. Broads, cocaine.

Don Atyeo and Felix Dennis, *The Holy Warrior: Muhammad Ali*. Nice pics.

Phil Berger, *Blood Season: Tyson and the World of Boxing*. Not awful.

Victor Bockris and Andrew Wylie. *Ali: Fighter — Poet — Prophet*. Affectionate fluff.

Ruben "Hurricane" Carter, *The Sixteenth Round*. From Rahway.

Jack Dempsey, as told to Bob Considine and Bill Slocum, *Dempsey: By the Man Himself*. The usual.

Jack Dempsey with Barbara Piattelli Dempsey, *Dempsey*. More of.

Nat Fleischer, *Leonard the Magnificent*. Not Ray.

Nat Fleischer, *Jack McAuliffe: The Napoleon of the Prize Ring*. Early lightweight.

Nat Fleischer, *Max Baer: Glamour Boy of the Ring*. Lousy binding.

Alan Goldstein, *A Fistful of Sugar: The Sugar Ray Leonard Story*. Lame twaddle.

Peter Heller, *Bad Intentions: The Mike Tyson Story*. Great quote*

Abe "The Newsboy" Hollandersky, *The Life Story of Abe the Newsboy*. Self-serving pap.

Robert Jakoubek, *Joe Louis: Heavyweight Champion*. Nice cover.

Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson Is a Dandy*. Ace autobio.

Henry Korn, *Muhammad Ali Retrospective*. Nice try.

Barney Nagler, *Brown Bomber: The Pilgrimage of Joe Louis*. Vegas, paranoia.

Jack Newcombe, *Floyd Patterson: Heavyweight King*. Shallow hype.

Randy Roberts, *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler*. Had hemorrhoids.

Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*. Occasionally interesting.

Bert Rosenthal, *Sugar Ray Leonard: The Baby-Faced Boxer*. No kidding.

Jack Rummel, *Muhammad Ali: Heavyweight Champion*. Tawdry cover.

Budd Schulberg, *Loser and Still Champion: Muhammad Ali*. Post-Frazier I.

Fraser Scott, *Weigh-In*. Pissed-off hasbeen.

Wilfrid Sheed, *Muhammad Ali*. Gr-r-reat pics.

Champ Thomas, *Sean O'Grady: Living Legend*. Shameless drivell.

José Torres, ... *Sting Like a Bee: The Muhammad Ali Story*. Actually OK.

José Torres, *Fire and Fear: The Inside Story of Mike Tyson*. Good gratuitous.

Gene Tunney, *Arms for Living*. Hubba hubba.

Tony Van den Bergh, *The Jack Johnson Story*. Often inaccurate.

A.S. "Doc" Young, Sonny Liston: *The Champ Nobody Wanted*. I wanted.

*Joe Bruno says, of Tyson's reform-school days: "I believe he sucked a prick once in a while."

PERIPHERAL POLIO – Heck, I'm *tired* of reviewin' boxing bks., it feels like a 90-round fight. But we can't stop now, got some peripherals to suss out... let's hit it!

—*I Only Talk Winning*. Angelo Dundee, former trainer of Ali, Leonard, and half the known universe, also talks at length about his workaholism and penis, but has great trouble talkin' losing: claims Basilio beat Fullmer, 8/28/59, "and was once again a champion" – 'stead of slapped silly, TKO'ed by Gene in 14.

—*Don Dunphy at Ringside*. Arguably the best of the radio blow-by-blow announcers, back when boxing broadcasts were the epitome of McLuhanoid "hot," Dunphy was only so-so on TV (though better, easily, than anyone today). A pleasant, if somewhat sidewalk-of-New-Yorky, memoir complete with transcripts of his work on select rounds of Louis-Conn I and (what a weird choice) Joe Frazier-Jimmy Ellis.

—*Only the Ring Was Square*. Barney Nagler gets another twocents in, this time by proxy — former Mad. Sq. Garden matchmaker Teddy Brenner tells him all, or some — on the ongoing theme of who, behind the scenes, was a shitfuck, and when. At last: the final lowdown on the fixing (through judge Artie Schwartz, who voted 9-6, Gavilan) of the Kid Gavilan-Billy Graham welterweight title fight.

—*Empire of Deceit*, by Dean Allison & Bruce B. Henderson, is the prosecution side (Allison worked as prosecutor) of the Harold Smith/Wells Fargo embezzlement case. Doesn't really understand boxing as context for such mischief (e.g., that its robber barons have often stage-directed equivalent major biz), but intrinsically readable as generic "true crime" pulp.

—*Garden of Innocents*, an account of the televising of Ali-Frazier I by its closed-circuit producers, Art Fisher & Neal Marshall, with Charles Einstein, is the most boring and pointless book ever done with Ali as even marginal focus. Stuff like how the on-screen clock got put in sync with the Garden ringside clock and who THEY!, Neal and Art, had coffee with after the fight.

— *I Never Played the Game*. Boxing's third worst announcer (behind only Sugar Ray Leonard and, for one fight, tennis commentator Bud Collins), as well as one of its more vocal bloodlusters (at the Foreman-Lyle fight: "He knocked him down! He knocked him down!"), Howard Cosell tenders his firm and final bye-bye to this cruel and brutal sport.

YOU COULD LOOK IT UP – Record books're all great; none aren't. Even skimpy yellowed de facto trade sheets like a '32 *Everlast Boxing Record* or a '58 *Boxing News Annual* are at least groovy as precious objects, precious less for how they look and smell (or what they're "worth") than for what they unavoidably are: boxing text at its most mundane (qua cosmic). Aside from the usual uses — memorizing complete careers of world champions and claimants; verifying successions to titles — they're great for perusing bigtime failure, like all you do is flip pages and eyeball for guys with more L's than W's. In the '82 edition of *The Ring Record Book*, for ex, you've got Omaha heavyweight James Hearn, who as of June '81 had got himself kayoed 14 times in 20 fights (total record: 3 wins, 16 losses, and a draw). Same book, Serge Sinelnikov, French middleweight: only 2 wins (in his first and most recent outings) in 21. A promising start? N.J. lightweight Iggy Villanueva's 0-7-0 (3 KO's against) is still a far cry from Italian junior welter Giuseppe Agate's 17-66-6 overall, 6-63-5 in his last 74.

Losers, by appearing in such naked print, may in turn get more work (winners need someone to win against) and lose some more, thus enhancing their earning power. Which makes you wonder: maybe they lie about their losses. Until recently, even (especially?) *The Ring Record Book*, Nat Fleischer's one enduring gift to etcet., did not require documentation of results. In '75, three years after his death (slimeball son-in-law Nat Loubet was by then editor), there was this real amazing listing for an African fighter named Muhammed Wee Wee, 8-0-0, with 74 wins over '20s Brit Joe

Beckett, '30s Frenchman Pierre Charles, '40s Brit Tommy Farr, and '50s Brit Dick Richardson — an enviable record!

The most (only?) seemingly reputable records guy right now, Dick Mastro, puts out a quasi-monthly called *Official Boxing Record*, but that's in mag form, not book.

OVERVIEW ROUNDUP — Maybe I've been too hard on Nat Fleischer. After all, he was one of the few prewar white writers to actually deal, non-pejoratively, with the whole immense black underbelly of boxing. Even today, his *Black Dynamite*, a 5-volume "Story of the Negro in Boxing" begun in '38 and finished in '47, remains the highwater opus on the subject. Although condescending in tone, and often little more than a series of glosses on the lives and careers of known quantities like Harry Wills and Kid Chocolate, it is just as often the sole lasting registry of long-forgot sonsofguns like Black Hill and Sambo Sutton. Good stuff, okay, I'll admit it.

Fleischer also had a hand in *A Pictorial History of Boxing*, him and Sam Andre wrote it, compiled the photos. It's been updated a couple times since he died. Some new photos added, others deleted, but it's still an O.K. visual feast.

Dedicated to Nat, "boxing's greatest ambassador," is *The Fight Game*, a silly father/son ("The old days were better"/"Not so") collaboration, mostly about Brits, by James and Frank Butler. Speaking of Brits, Gilbert Odd's *Encyclopedia of Boxing* has it all over American John D. McCallum's *Encyclopedia of World Boxing Champions*. Well maybe not all over, just more entries (junior divisions, Euro and British champs), color pics. More Brits: Peter Arnold's *All-Time Greats of Boxing* has no lt. heavies between Carpentier and Michael Spinks, and requests fair play for "victim of propaganda" Max Schmeling; captions in Angus G. Garber III's *Boxing Legends* identify Tony Janiro as Tony Zale, and Rocky Marciano as Graziano; *The Great Heavyweights*, by the Chuck Wepner of British boxing, Henry Cooper (both bled like sieves, both knocked down Muhammad Ali but were in turn knocked out), has a nice photo of the author being fouled to the groin by Italian contender Piero Tbmasoni.

Back in the U.S. of A., Chuck Burroughs' *Come Out Fighting: True Fight Tales for Fight Fans* reads true and fighty enough, only most of the fights seem to've taken place in Peoria. "Peoria went wild!" ... wish I'd been there.

NO FILM AT 11 – The best unfilmed boxing novel I've read is *The Sailor* and *The Fox* by this Bermudan, Brian Burland. Pretty good depiction of boxing-as-pain. Worst is *The Knockout Artist*, not one of Harry Crews's better works, sort of half kinkykinkykinky and half Boy Scouts/U.S.A., proffering boxing as wholesome get-down compared to

some of the kink. I ain't read W.C. Heinz's *The Professional*, which Bruce Bebb tells me's the best, "but kind of Hemingwayish." Got a copy but haven't read Shaw's 1886 boxing novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession* – the type's too small. Forty-two pages is all I could handle of *The Devil's Stocking*, Nelson Algren's roman a clef about Ruben Carter – Emile Griffith is "Emil Griffin," Joey Giardello is "Joey Gardello" – okay, I get it. *The Detective Wore Silk Drawers*, a Sgt. Cribb mystery by Peter Lovesey, has late bare-knuckle boxing as its *mise en scene*. Great ring scene in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*: some fighter gets shot *during a fight*. Paul Cain's *Fast One*.... Stories by Charles Bukowski.... Allusion to John L. Sullivan in *Absalom, Absalom!*...

STILL ONE PLACE TO GO – "How to" books are where Nat Fleischer really shines. Lemme just quote from his *Training for Boxers*: "Bad blood will result in skin eruption, in the appearance of boils. As soon as these show themselves, take a laxative." Same book: "The power which drives the muscles on as the power of steam drives an engine, is produced by the nerves." From *How to Box*: "The good boxer will find that a clear, good head, one that will enable the brain to function almost automatically, is a tremendous asset." Hmm, okay, here's one, from *How to Second and How to Manage a Boxer*: "Blood is thicker than water. It's thicker than crude rubber in a fighter's corner. It's no place for a family tree." Okay, dig *this*, from *Scientific Blocking and Hitting*: "Of course, we have often seen a lad connect with the punch soporific after he had been whipped by his opponent, but why take the chances of being eventually sent to the booby-hatch, when you can avoid all that by learning how to box scientifically" – thanx, I believe I will!

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Cover Stories

Famous San Diego characters



I go for a score: male-bonding gambit #502. "I understand" — dig this — "we've got something in common. Both of us were 4-F during the Vietnam War."

What?! Can this be right? Actual, literal Q & A with R * O * G * E * R H * E * D * G * E * C * O * C * K, who you thought would rather lose his dingus than submit to another, ulp, ordeal by newsprint??? Yup, that's *right*: not a bluff, nor ploy, nor "yellow journalistic" slight of copy. Your eyes, and this newsheet, deceive you not. The real "thing," daddy-o!



So get settled, get comfy, crack open a beer, an ale, fix yourself a whiskey (or vodka) (or gin) (or etcet.) and mixer, or a freshly squeezed citrus beverage or hot steamy mug of your favorite caffeinated poison, fetch that pretzel box or cookie tin you've been hiding or hoarding for uninvited creepos or children, shoes off, socks, feet up, phone disconnected ... some mighty good reading ahead! But first, please, well don't skip *directly* to the voluminous Q's, the voluminous A's, the clearly labeled "Rog,' Verbatim" section beginning on page 17, not just yet. As readers it is certainly your prerogative — shucks — your good ol' American *freedom*, but please, um, let a good ol' *author* call the shots for a change, the *readerly* shots, let's wind this thing out in sequence....



Next to God, *people* are what life is all about.

— Paul Johnson, liner notes to the Belairs' *The Origins of Surf Music 1960-63*

There's this not uninteresting person, see, a *semi* not uninteresting guy who for lunch one day goes to this trendy restaurant, where upon entering he tells the hostess "No smoking" and she says "There'll be a five-minute wait, may I please

have your name?" and he's so pissed that she doesn't RECOGNIZE HIM he coldly snaps "*We'll take smoking*" — boy is he peed off!

A self-involved guy, an occasionally interesting self-involved guy who in fact on occasion can be mildly *entertaining*, the party in question is also capable of keeping an *incredibly* straight face, revealing little except by design, allowing few stray gestures (even when talking on the phone), smiling principally to indicate nail-on-the-head "glee" and nothing more subtle (or casual) than that, and is thus hardly, in spite of a longstanding partytime rep, the most damn fun in the world.

"Self-involved guy?" *I'm* a self-involved guy. Takes one to know one? Possibly. This other self-involved guy, meantime, was once your mayor. Not mine, though. I'm from *elsewhere*.

From elsewhere to your town by rail and motorcar. Travel time: three hours.

An out-of-town hit man? An out-of-town patsy? Dunno. (I'm still figuring.)

And why me? Why have I been chosen? Again, dunno, not exactly, but I do know by *whom* I've been chosen. I've been chosen by Thomas K. Arnold.

Tom Arnold — "T.K." to his friends — that wildcrazyyoungprolific musicwriter (politicswriter) (anythingwriter) from your midst; give him a dime, he'll write about... anything. The young are like that. (Was young once, twice myself and can *relate*.) Fast food, Barry Manilow recitals, the price of 90-watt bulbs in Pacific Beach — you name it, dangle a token three-or-four-figure carrot, and this boy will write it. It takes a few carrots to service the BMW. Hey, only kidding — his stuff is *good*. Good stuff and plenty of it, on all subjects but one, make that two. He's never written on the life and times of Hosiab Famputter (1819-1904), inventor of the first mass-market pork laxative ("Hoglax"), not a *word* on the s.o.b. And he's never written, not to my knowledge, 'bout the soul, the psyche, the life behind the eyes of his partytime cohort, musical collaborator, and close personal friend, Roger Hedgecock.

You don't write about close personal friends. Well I do, I've done it — yeah, ha, it's tricky/sticky — but T.K. Arnold, no. Not this one. For this one he wants *me*. Me, I'm guessing, because Lester Bangs has been a pile of dust since '82. You couldn't be deader. Once, howe'er, he lived, swallowed like candy the cotton strips inside Benzedrex and Vicks inhalers, prolifically wrote, was prolifically published, and served as role model number one (first; foremost) for an even wilderyoungercrazier

Thomas K. Arnold. When one is dust, you go for two (second; secondary). Two in this case was/is me.

To live ... that I, less than Lester, might write up some young gaga's drinking pal. It was not initially appealing. "You'll love Roger," the gaga's AT&T crackle assured me. *Love, huh?* I could hear my crackly mind-voice retorting. *I hear it's a many-splendored thing. Somebody once 'assured' me I'd love golf.* "Every reporter," the phone voice continued, "has gotten him wrong. A bunch of total wimps. I really think you're the one who can do it right." *Well, gee, thanks, us #2 's aim to please.*

And what he told Roger, let's assume, was "You'll love Richard. He's my favorite all-time pulp scribbler after this other one who's dead ." That and the fact that I wasn't one of these prick reporters, one of these vested-interest poison-pen you knows who were at least X-percent responsible for his fabled Undoing. An undoing 'bout which, detail wise, I knew *dick*. Less than dick. I hardly knew Roger from Shinola, his "saga" from that of the Grand Coulee Dam. And that other dam, Oroville, no, Glen Canyon, no. *Hoover*, um, Nancy — I can't say I knew her from, dunno, my ass. That Italian fellow, Gary something, Jerry? Didn't know him from a bucket of Viennese phlegm. A bunch of names, you read the paper, some of them carry across town lines, county lines, mid to back pages, if you're lucky you see 'em.

I was lucky at the time of Tom-boy's offer to even *recognize* the name Hedgecock. But I didn't know his face; nor those of the "others." If you don't know the eyes, ears, and noses that go with the names, if you don't know the words, the deeds, that accompany these names, these features, in their local "permanent records," it's kind of hard to imagine getting it up for a round of "Why'd you do it?" — "*Did you do it?*" — any of *that*, especially when you're not even terribly sure what *it*, as either historical datum or point of regional relevance, happens to, y'know, be. I didn't know such shit, nor did I *care*. With no axe to grind — not even a pen knife! — I was a shoo-in. Roger said yes to Tom-boy, yes to me. But would I say yes to these two fuggaloonies?

Well, obviously I did, right? I did because Roger Hedgecock meant zip to me. Same reason I was acceptable to him, he's acceptable to me. What "intrigued" me was he was just another bloke in a town I was barely aware of. A guy who might conceivably be that town's superduperstar of the moment, or one among a select few superdupers, but in any event a superduper *beyond my realm of ultimate, or even topical, concern*. The scale of his "significance" was at best silly to my alien sensors, strictly funnybone city, and at worst ponderous — though hardly a ponderous that could crack an egg if I carried one. (However the wind blew, it wouldn't kill me.)

I could try it on as a character study, say; a little third-person warmup, workout; a final stretching exercise before switching (forever) to fiction. The heart of darkness (or temple of light) (or suburban pastiche) behind the Hedgecock "persona." If it reads like reportage, fine, but 'tain't my priority, my intention. "Getting it right"? — I haven't gotten, or cared about getting, anything right since the sixties. No, that's a lie, I care passionately for such biz, but if I miss, so *what* — I'm not a reporter. Besides, I owe nothing to Roger, nothing to Tom. Okay, I'll do it. Yes, Tom. Yes, Roger, sir, your honor.

No, wait, do I have to hang out with these muhfuhs, er, gentlemen? Hmmm ... okay. I'll bring along some aspirin, some Alka-Seltzer.

Okay.

A DATE WITH URINE AND KISMET — So okay. I've been chosen, I've been pre-approved, and not only that, I've been scheduled. Penciled in. Roger has said, we've spoken by phone and he's told me: "Just come down." Come down, for starters, to his morning talk show. "It's fairly central to what I'm doing now. Starting there is a good place to start." We'll start on a Monday, at KSDO. And return there, on top of whatever else we fit in, on Tuesday or Wednesday or, better yet, Thursday. Or Friday. "I don't wanna sound narcissistic, but it might be fun, it might be interesting, to have you come in, take the fresh look you'll be taking, and describe to my listeners what you've seen, what my week has been like." But first, Monday. The Monday after a week of on-location broadcasts from Puerto Vallarta, just before Thanksgiving.

"You won't need more time," I ask, mulling the scenario, "to recover from Mexico?"

"No. I've been there so often that my state of mind slips easily in and back out again, like the space shuttle coming in from its, ha ha, moon landing."

"Will there be any problem with security?"

"I'll leave your name with Rachel, the receptionist."

"Should I call a day before for confirmation?"

"*This* is confirmation. See you then." Okay, *then*. I come down, I show up, I present myself to Rachel, she says *whuh* and hands me to Gayle Falkenthal, Roger's

producer, who says: "He didn't tell *me* anything about this." Great, wunnerful, and remembering why I stopped writing personal pieces — *real*, especially superstar, person pieces — in 1976, I fumble to explain myself.

"Well, heh, he even had this idea of having me on the show to kind of y'know catalogue, from left field, what he's *done* all week."

"That's peculiar. All guests are approved through me, and this week is completely booked." So I sit on my hands 'til a newsbreak.

Listening, for the first and conceivably last time, to Roger Hedgecock, talk-show host. And some caller, some old guy on the P.A., claiming, "Every time I urinate, it's bright yellow." A pause, no laughter, he continues: "And my regular doctor. Dr. Lindt, won't see me." Tragic, certainly poignant, in any event a *problem*. "What should I do?"

"Have you tried to contact [etcetera, blah blah]?" asks Roger. He does not — 'scuse me but he doesn't — sound too "sincere." Or, I dunno, sympathetic. Kind of dry, drony, impersonal. How could he be "personal" with the urinator? Dunno, and he ain't. Tells him, with supreme generic finality, "Call your congressman." Way to go!

The next caller, a younger male dope, is more concerned with the color, the form, of local things-o-beauty than with hues and tints of personal weewee. "I don't care about these so-called artists and their *reputations*" — talking 'bout those muralists, sculptors, and the like who've been granted the chore of spiffing up allotted eyefuls of San Diego — "I just want this town to look good." A *worthy* concern — bravo! bravo! — so this time Rog' waxes specific. Tells him, with a sudden cheeriness you could make a sandwich with, to call some bigwig, an artso bureaucrat (name; number) who can set him, perhaps, on the goody two-shoed path of civic voluntarism w/ a visual twang. (Maybe he'll get to prune some trees.)

Next bozo, er, citizen, an irate female between 25 and 60, has a bone to pick with *the things they show in commercials*. "There's this one, I can't remember what it's for, where the *pot* is boiling over and they have a *child* standing there! Tell me, Roger, what does this teach our kids about safety?"

Sponsored

"Don't look to *me*" — he's as irate as she — "for a testimonial on the virtues of commercial television. At home when I'm watching, I hit the mute button the second

a commercial comes on. Watch enough commercials and your mind turns to...."
Then he does a commercial.

Three calls, three topics, three distinct flavors of Hedgecock. I squirm in my modular seat, brace myself for four, five, and more, when a door swings open and, hand extended, the man himself strides forth, call-it-a-smile on his mug, six inches taller than I expected. Reminds me — you don't know him — of Eric Morris, Long Island veterinarian. Light tweedy jacket, v light blue cotton shirt, darkish striped tie, tan (brushed twill?) slacks, Bio-Glide shoes the color of Campbell's cream of mushroom.

Shake. Shake. He's sorry if there's been [blah blah, etcetera]. "Didn't I tell you," he begins asking, then switches to declarative, "I'm sure I did, to call first so we could arrange a schedule." Well, no, as a matter of fact, and I shrug and he shrugs and not much is said and I follow him into the broadcast booth. Roger my dream match — thank you, Tom Arnold! — what a shitty, shitty way to start a dream date.

DOUBLE-SPEAK AT THE KSDO CORRAL — Headphones on. A set for Roger and a set for me. "My role on this show as I see it" — I can hear him, barely, in spite of the 'phones — "is primarily *educational*. My job is to make people think." Thinking of something myself, I wonder what I might otherwise ordinarily be *doing* at this hour, 11-plus A.M., on a nothing autumn Monday such as this. Probably taking a healthy morning b.m.

"The Murph'!" intones the hour's first potential thinker. "I can't understand why certain employees of your station insist on calling Jack Murphy Stadium The Murph.'"

"Personally I agree with you," replies Roger, private citizen, "it's a *very* stupid name. But," offers Roger, public pedagogue, "that's what we have here — freedom of speech. If you object that strongly, write the station manager," i.e., you do it (I'll lead you to water, but you drink).

Next: "What about the homeless?" — a heart-on-sleeve senior would like t' know.

"We have this problem," recites Roger, pushing freedom this time like a take-it-or-leave-it theologian trumpeting free *will*, "because of freedom of choice."

Food for thought, then food for bellies: two calls about lobster. "Roger," says one, then (quite identically) the other, "I just took my family to [such & such formerly

fabulous lobster joint] in Puerto Nuevo and lemme tell *you* the price has gone *up*. Up up up! So I was wondering, um, where do you take *your* family these days, y'know, for lobster at a reasonable, affordable price?" To which he hems, haws, protecting (it seems) a favored secret crustacean pit... why can't he just tell 'em, do your own lobster thinking?

Next dialer, maybe the day's biggest dummy, wants nothing from Roger, nothing more, that is, than more of same. "I just wanna compliment you on the great job you've been doing of enlightening the people. You're doing an excellent, excellent, a very great job." I study Roger's face as he takes this horseshit in. He's not smirking or grinning; he's not even smiling. A smile could mean he's genuinely *touched* by such crap, but it might also suggest irony, sarcasm, contempt. Which he doesn't seem to wanna *chance* tipping off, not facially, not even to someone *on the other end of the line*. If a camera were on him, okay, such stolidness might make sense, but there's no camera, and he can't be playing just to *me* (can he?), so this must be the way he normally *behaves*. (Political-arena habits die hard?) Poor baby.

It goes on like this — calls and more calls you would have to be paid *extremely* well not to hang up on, or you'd have to be *starving* for as weird anonymous tokens of pop affection — this plus some Smalltalk, me and him, during commercials. Stuff like, hmm, can't remember what... (is it "fun" yet?) (will this hour ever end?)... basic nothin'.

The broadcast over, enough of this nothin', I go for a *score*: male-bonding gambit #502. "I understand" — dig this — "we've got something in common. Both of us were 4-F during the Vietnam War." A little something I've been saving for an ex-mayor, ha, and *this* ex-mayor does not miss a beat. Presto, micro-instantaneously, with no discernible shift in physiognomy (deadpan) or intonation (flat): "Well, first I was 1-Y. They had me come back. My skin was so bad on my neck, my back, and my shoulders that my doctor told them I could only wear 100% cotton, and tropical climates were *out*." Swell, neat, beside which *my* alibi must ring a tad conventional (my gift to Roger): "I convinced 'em I was nuts." He, snickering: "I wonder how difficult *that* was!" Me ... he ... me ... he: dialogue (well, almost) — but does this make us buddies? Not yet. He hands me some junk from his desk.

Gone a week so there's all this mail, opened and un-. Shows me an opened that's a home-made comic book — pencil and ballpoint on typing paper, folded, stapled — drawings of male/female genitalia and of marijuana, both living and rolled. "One listener's fantasy of our stay in P.V.," chuckles Rog', "the product of a very fertile imagination." Above the desk, in bright red "blood drip" lettering, a bumper sticker: "Trust the Soviets? Ask the Afghans."

A silence, mighty and weighty. Then, apropos of nothing I'm aware of (though he is in fact holding a hand writ missive): "I think Americans should study Latin and Greek, I really do. If they don't know the roots of their language, you know what they're stuck with? Orwellian doublespeak." Sounds feasible, yes, and I nod so. "To lunch?" I nod again, and we split as airless and anti-life a studio, office, waiting room — as any in the town where my own mail is delivered, a town justly *famous* for such biz.

In my rented and dented Dodge Colt, I follow your ex-mayor's purple-black Caddy to the freeway. At which point he tries, or could be construed as trying, to lose me. Zoom, whiz, lane changes, in & out, *fast* — with apparent calculation to be done w/ me. To merely keep eye contact, I'm forced to slam throttle to the floor, and after two-three hairy minutes, lacking binocs, I lose sight of him. Of course he ain't said where we're going.

Then an accident or something snarls up traffic and I see, catch, and follow him. We park somewhere. I express dismay, incredulity. "You should see me when I drive all-out," he tells me. "This was pretty restrained. I learned how to drive in Tijuana."

We drink

or break open

our veins solely

to know.

— Charles Olson, "Maximus, from Dogtown — !"

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ROGER HEDGECOCK — The Corvette, in Hillcrest — you been there? Heard of? A lighter, brighter, more forcibly "fifties" version of the Greezy Follicle (Phoenix), P.J. Ike's (Chicago), the Bar-&-Grill Diner (Minneapolis) or, in the town, the city, where I hang my hat, the Hard Rock Cafe. "Fifties"? Well, a larger-than-life Connie Francis, two-dimensional, framed, hangs not far from our table in (though neither of us smokes) the designated cancer section. We don't smoke but we drink. "Order me a Bohemia," says Roger as he splits for a whiz. "If they don't have it, Corona." Corona it is.

When he comes back, they start comin' over, one at a time, two at a time: respect-payers aplenty. The whole room, 'cept for the name-taker at the door, the bimbo who failed to recognize him, knows the face, the man, wants to shake the man's

hand or talk shop with him. The shakers/talkers have names as well: losing city council candidate Neil Good; gray-flattopped county supervisor George Bailey; various fish, beef, and fowl, major/minor/local. Roger's take on the non-recog has quasi-endeared him to me (y'know: "humanized" him), and seeing a fatso I ask: "Is that whatsisname, the fat guy you ran against, that loser?" "No, you mean Dick Carlson" — his eyes light up — "and he *was* a loser. That guy, ha, I had 17 some odd felony counts hanging over my head, and he couldn't beat me! Now *that's* a loser."

Peering at Connie's pic, thinking rock-a-rock-roll, I then ask: "What's your next single gonna be?" Yes, I've heard the Arnold-Hedgecock Experience's "Louie, Louie" b/w "Wild Thing" — an especially fine "horrible" Hedgecock vocal on the latter — and find it no worse, and probably *less* carcinogenic, than anything by Sting, Aerosmith, or Madonna. (Honest!)

"Well, this time we're gonna do a classic that should have enough muscle to stand up to our interpretation, 'Summertime Blues,' and back it with another all-time great, 'Born to Be Wild.' If we can't sell records with those two, we may retire." As if on cue, the other half of Arnold-Hedgecock arrives, selects meatloaf, and I ask 'em both: "Which *version* of 'Summertime Blues'?" T.K., in black-and-silver Judas Priest tee-shirt, says, "Blue Cheer, of course," meaning the late-sixties acid version, but Roger stands firm for the (somewhat tepid, and certainly overrated) Eddie Cochran fifties original. There are no votes for the Who.

Our waitress comes, shakes her mock-fifties waitress booty, roleplays antediluvian waitress coquetry, and Roger, a naturally flirty guy, flirts back. One-liners are traded, they're both good at this, back, forth, bawdy, bawdier, then Roger says: "Tell me — do blacks blush?" She's black, gosh golly, and she now turns metaphoric chartreuse.

"Well, Massa" — trying hard to be cool — "the *sun* affects our coloration, don't know if you were aware of *that*, and —"

"The only reason I ask is I lived with a black woman in college, and I never saw her blush. I also never got around to asking her, and if you don't ask, you don't learn." Ah! the knower! ... the known! ... the nature and grounds of knowing! Roger Hedgecock, epistemologist!

Which is to say — hey! I sincerely believe this! — Roger's remark is not racist. No way. Only a cheeseball journalist would call it that (I *puke* on such creatures). No, I'm an epistemologist myself, and my own gut reaction at this point is simply *who the hell is Roger??* Or: *Which* Roger is Roger?? Is Roger "knowable"?? Stuff like that.

And I'm not talking standard operational doubt, that suspension of belief it pays to invest when you're sitting 'cross tables from self-involved public figures. All such figfoiks are "slippery "; they keep things "hidden," "submerged."

But this one here is something more, something else. A truly complex mo-fucker — or so I'm guessing, so I *wanna* guess.

When T.K. follows up on the blush biz by asking, waitress out of earshot, "What color are their clitorises?" and Roger replies, deadpan, "The usual — pink, brown, *you know*," who the heck is the singer of "Wild Thing" playing to, which of us (both?) is the performance tailored *for*? Because, don't get me wrong, the performance is *good*; I admit I "enjoy" it. He's beginning to remind me more of Kim Fowley or Paul Krassner than Eric Morris, hound doctor, but I need to know — *want* to know — what it is I'm being *given* to know ... what the knowledge serving suggestions are.

By my third beer I'm swimming in imponderables. Just how much is Roger "revealing"? What does he *think* he's revealing? Have I witnessed, in fact, any "unguarded moments"? Is the hidden, the submerged, substantially "different" from the willfully tendered? Is he choreographing surface elements of my presumed story (any more intentionally than he's choreographing surface aspects of his own life)? Would I be seeing more (less) of the choreographed ("real") Roger if Arnold weren't around? Are his smiles ever ingenuous? On a performance (qua performance) level, is he always this "on"?

Is it knowledge yet? With Roger, I'm beginning to suspect it never is.

RUMINATIONS ON ROGER -- Ruminations #3: He's a lonely man the way I'm a lonely man. How am I a lonely man? None of your business.

CRIMINALS BEWARE

You Are Being Watched

COMMUNITY

ALERT

NEIGHBORHOOD

So reads a sign not 30 yards from the Hedgecock manse: three first downs. Wary enough already, it's a good thing I'm not a burglar. "Naw," I can say as they snap on the cuffs, "I'm here for Monday Nile Football." Boys' nite out.

At the manse, though, it's boys' nite in. Jamie Hedgecock, 10, undaunted by the presence or manner of the bearded stranger, greets me and leads me to a kitchen where his old man, in red-striped knit shirt, is just now completing his substitute feedbag chore. Dirty dishes are dealt with. Paintings of food line the upper walls. "My dad did them. They're oils," states Roger proudly. They're good. The younger of two latest-generation Hedgecocks, Christopher, offers me an ice cream pop. Mrs. H, Cindy, is out getting her MBA.

For his recent 7th birthday Chris got a Garfield tee-shirt, a Garfield birthday card, and a battery-powered dune buggy with some oomph to it. "It can go 20 miles an hour," he boasts. "Some go 100, but they use gas." He and his brother have set up a rug as a dune and, with dad on the phone, they invite me to join them. For 5-10 minutes we take turns on the remote without squabble or hint of competitiveness. Not between each other, not between them and me. Relating to me as less a goofy but willing adult than a slightly larger mammal-at-play than themselves, they're the most eerily non-neurotic children I've ever met.

From the dune room you can see airplanes. Lights. It's *nice* to live near, and discreetly above, a smalltown airport; scenic but not too loud. This close to LAX or JFK you'd wanna blow your brains out. Also in the room, blueprints. "Align retaining wall w/ edge of column." Neither homeowner nor architect, I dunno what that means.

Game time nigh, the four of us ascend a staircase. At the first landing: a painting of Roger. Life-size, standing. Executed with a good deal more linseed than the still lifes downstairs, it glistens. Also: framed photos of the kids, together and separate, a photo of Roger with the kids, and a line drawing of Cindy.

Chicago vs. Denver — who will win? In the ultimate scheme of things, who cares? "I *really* want Chicago to win," says Roger. "A Bronco loss enhances San Diego's playoff position." The Chargers' 8-1 record looking nearly unassailable (who's to guess they're about to go 0-6 the rest of the way as the Broncos go 6-1 and into the frigging Super Bowl?), I scoff. "You're a real scoffer," I'm then told.

"Say — isn't the Super Bowl *in* San Diego this year?" — suddenly recalling a semi-significant NFL datum.

"You bet it is, and I'm the one who brought it here."

"Yeah?"

"Well, me and Gene Klein, when I was mayor. He got the other owners, enough of them, to pay up for past debts, ha — he'd got them their TV contract. But I arranged the meeting."

"No shit." (I'm impressed.)

"In fact, well, at the time you don't expect these things, but the assumption *then* was it would bring so much money into the area. Now if the Chargers make it to the Super Bowl, still a big if, there'll be less coming in, fewer out-of-towners at hotels, partying, consuming, spending big bucks locally, etc."

"So whudda you prefer. Chargers or a few extra bucks for local capitalists?" "Oh, I'm a Charger fan!" Then in walks Charger fan Thomas Kirk Arnold with chips, Cheetos, and *many* 6-packs of Bohemia.

No mugs — who needs 'em? — but coasters are everywhere. No, actually just on wood. On glass tops, no coasters. No bowls for the Cheetos, which Roger declines ("No junk food for me tonight"), or chips. No napkins. The upstairs toilet, which we soon begin needing, has the quietest flush in America.

Game's on, Broncos down by 14, it looks pretty safe for the Chargers. I recite (by rote) a nasty rumor 'bout announcer Frank Gifford's first divorce. They laugh, the grownups not the kids, and begin discussing their next Experience gig, three weeks hence at some biker rally. "Outlaw bikers or the goody-goodies?" Goody-goodies. Clothing is discussed — what to *wear* for these fine, good chaps in their clean jeans and leathers? Jacketwise, T.K. has got (and is wearing) one of your basic off-rack New Age narrow-lapel jobs, off-white, and Roger's got similar, but what about trousers? "What size pants you wear?" asks Tom of his partner. "Oh, I don't know, 34, 35."

"35?" muses Jamie. "When we went shopping with Mom, you were 36." "That's not true!" Dad protests. Then, noticing me frantically scribble: "You're not gonna *write this*, are you?" Hey, this is where the LITERATURE is.

The kids, restless, start wrestling with T.K. — hammerlocks, headlocks — which eventually permutes to T.K. versus Roger for 30–40 seconds; a draw. Then, as John

Elway shakes belated life into the Denver troops, the kids are urged off to sleep, and we escalate the smut level, verbal. Following a surprisingly easy Bronco score. Spuds McKenzie shows his snout for the King of Beers, forcing Roger to comment on the, um, mixed-metaphoricality of it all. "Spuds is a female, you know."

"No fucking *shit*?" (A well-read guy — weller than I — again I'm impressed).

"Right. A female impersonating a male in a fucking *bestiality* commercial! Now I think anyone who isn't perverted in some way by the '90s will be very lonely, but this really is *sick*. "

Big yuks all around. The chips gone, I reach for a handful of Cheetos. Denver scores again; Roger grimaces, grins, launches a monologue. "My wife should be home soon ... I'm very happy she's continuing to grow ... did I tell you she's at school?... learning the ropes of small business... really great with computers ... a terrific mom, meanwhile, to the boys ... but *no*, she's no mere housewife, no Stepford Wife, no lobotomy case... " — and what th-?! Can this be? At the top of the stairs, what incredible (ho) timing: Cin-n-n-ndy Hedgecock!

Who reminds me of the highly pleasant Nancy Nuttall. "Oh boy!" — spotting Cheetos — "Junk food!" Hubby doesn't grin.

Denver 31, Chicago 29. Fug-a-duck. Time expires. The talk turns to ... cars. So happens I'm in the market for. "You owe it to yourself to buy American," says Roger. "Get a Ford Taurus."

"Well, I was thinking of another Honda. My current one's lasted me 11 years. I can't really imagine any kind of *Ford* is gonna —"

"The reports on the Taurus have been *excellent*. Why encourage Japanese technology?"

Which leads, somewhat willy-nilly, to chit-chat on the Japanese getting a certain kind of bomb dropped on them; on a certain country that has not once but twice dropped non-test versions of that same kinda bomb; on bombs in general; countries in general; and finally those terrible, horrible, loathsome, disgusting Soviets. Whoa — I interrupt — "You actually *believe* that crap?" Crap about the terrible Soviets; 'bout how in the not too distant future even Republican administrations will begin "surrendering" to 'em.

"Oh yes. Yes I do. Definitely."

I look at T.K. Arnold. *This* is what he gets me into? Sipping beers and trading quips with Wally George? I want irony from *some* corner of the room, goddamit. (T.K. is wearing a smile face.)

"You don't think" — me again — "our own shithouse is as loathsome as theirs?" (Too drunk to, y'know, specifically, non-poetically articulate.)

"No" — and he's not too much sharper on his drinkfeet than me, and on and on it goes, then he throws in a *lulu*. The Kennedy assass, *John* Kennedy, was pulled off — sez Rog' — by yup, right... the Soviets! (A conspiracy theory you prob'ly ain't heard since, oh, the day they shot Lee Harvey Oswald.)

On this lulu I exit, yowling, to my rented mixed-parented shitty Lee lacoccamobile.

The object of oratory is not truth, but persuasion.

— aphorism in fortune cookie. Panda Inn, Horton Plaza

THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH — Hotelsville, double-digit Tuesday A.M.: what to do? How 'bout this: same as yesterday this hour, but without the drive or having to actually be in the same room with a non-ironically rightwing tanktown celeb? Er, 'scuse me, did I say *tanktown*? Sorry, I only meant — you know what I meant. Scaled down just a tad from my own. But yes, that sounds groovy: tuning my radio dial to eleven point whatever...

"*Roger Hedgecock talks with you-u-u*" — there. I've got it. And let's see who the you's are today. (And the Rogers.)

— A frustrated panda fancier. Took his kids to the zoo. Waited ... waited ... the panda situation was *intolerable*. "Is it really *fair* for them not to tell you in *advance* how awfully *long* you will have to wait?" "You're right — they should certainly warn you about the wait." *Give 'em hell, Roger!*

— A homophobe. "AIDS, Roger, AIDS AIDS AIDS [and these, ugh, people's vile unnatural etc.] in San Diego!" Roger: "And it's getting worse. Irresponsible gays are moving here in alarming numbers — to take advantage of our looser bathhouse

laws." Lance, what an idea, let's move to SAN DIEGO so we can fuck & be fucked anally w/out condoms in BATHHOUSES and get and spread AIDS!

— A childabuserophobe. "What can be done? How can we stop these animals from touching and killing our kids?" "It's clearcut — child abusers should be murdered." Well, at least (for once) it's not a euphemism like "executed."

Okay. It wouldn't be stretching things to dub the morning's "subtext" (as the French would call it) the Fundamental Wretchedness of Life, or shall we say of Postmodern (i.e., *postlife*) Life, yet neither callers nor callee come close to frontally addressing it. They spit out a topical cum "controversial" XY, Rogers spits back YX, or YX plus a sidebar or disclaimer, and not only does the mere *utterance* of a reshuffled X and Y make all the *official* diff in the world — these are, amazingly enough, satisfied customers! — it effectively blots out the wretched root *content* of all conceivable (and conceivably wretched) X-Y variations. (There's never a Z.) A symptomatic root *canal*, as it were, done with neither hypnosis nor mirrors (and certainly not an act of aural surgery!) (nor a decent painkiller), its not especially conscious means are the reduction of linguistic volition to truism, tautology; its end, the dressing of scattergun pathos as popgun bathos...

— A responsible gay San Diegan, so-called, calls: "I agree about the bathhouses. I've stopped going. They should be closed." Roger: "You've made the wise choice. It's a shame your community has to suffer because of the decline in gay leadership."

Leadership, shmeadership. The people who yell for it most are leaders themselves. It's like supply-side ("trickle down") economics — who wants to be trickled *on*? If you let people lead you, you get, well, you get to be *led*. All this "take me to your leader" bullcrap. Just *once* I'd like to see a visiting saucerperson demand: "Take me to your easily led."

(ROGER RUMINATION #9: Jeff Daniels of *Something Wild* as a Hedgecock cipher. A makebelieve square-one square who can be "led" to some good times, some hottimes, to and through certain strong and/or dangerous currents easily avoided by actual squares. Taken a step further: Roger as *self*-generated, *self*-led Jeff Daniels; a dude in need of little outside prodding for crosscurrent by-the-numbers U-name-it.)

— A Maureen O'Connor skeptic (last call before I'm led to drink): "Can you *believe* the things our current mayor has been *doing* [vis-à-vis etc., etc., etcetera]?" Former mayor H.: "I won't comment on the *political* issue. It would only

sound like sour grapes." Geez what a grim lost-once-&-the-tears-are-endless type of guy! Which leads me to reexamine my own loss history ...

RUMINATION 9 — I once ran for what was it, um, yeah, junior class prez or rep and lost by six lousy votes, a real teenage heartbreak backbreak jeez and all those times and *these* times and all the goddam *things* I've had that mattered, things in my grasp that mattered and were *taken* away, away away by creeps by jerks by azzholes — books! jobs! shows! fellowships! girlfriends! — kicked outta Yale for scribbling brilliant rock-crit ahead of its time, a promising academic etc. down the New Haven sewer! — 400-page masterpiece autobio snatched from the printers with minutes to go, sole manuscript subsequently lost forever lost — Judy love of my life to age 25 (*Judy!!*) runs off and marries her math prof (I've been dyin' ever since!) — fired by THIS scumbait station for exercising my "freedom" of speech on the air, rejected by THAT scumbag mag for giving 'em belles-lettres instead of pulp, 4 billion unpublished pages, mildew on the master-works, mother didn't love me, father didn't love me, turned down for a Sears charge card, loss loss where's my next rent check coming from? and I'm supposed to feel um *sympathy* for Roger Hedgepecker's once-now-never-before sudden forced take on the universal (ask Buddha!) phenomenon of LOSS, loss of the ooh aah merry m * a * y * o * r * a * l * i * t * y Cal-Pacific Squodunk, er, Greater/Lesser Tattooparlerville, no, c'mon, North Tijuana (South West Anaheim!) f'rchristchristfugsuckingsake shit dammit???! Well I don't! Do not! No sympathy! Nyaah. nyaah! (You can't make me!)

OK, got *that* out of my system.

ROG', VERBATIM -- Back at the manse for some one-on-one. No T.K. Arnold this time. I've brought my recorder and some tapes. I've also, heh, done some Roger reading — so much for the "total stranger" angle. Don't wanna feel like an unprepared geek.

We begin by conversing on rock-roll Then and Now, as appropriate an entry point as any, as common a ground as our age. (Him: 41. Me: 42.) No partytime tack tonight; let's keep it... intellectual. A single pint of Cuervo Gold between us for the duration. He slices some limes, gets some glasses and salt, we slump in matching chairs in the downstairs, I guess you'd call it the living room. All other downstairs rooms are dark.

As we start talkin', I notice, for the first time since initially laying ears on him, that Roger's voice is *not* vibrating with that — whatcha call it? — radio resonance. Which, it's about time, puts me at relative ease. If I seem so eased out I occasionally ham

things up from my end, tune me out (I'm the Q, he's the A). Roger Hedgecock's talk with ME I share with YOU...

Q: ... rock and roll, which goes to the root of who *you* are ...

A: I think it's at least an *expression* of who I am.

Q: ... was once a so-called liberating music for the mind, body, and spirit.

A: It was for me in that respect, uh, because it was the music of black people expressing a frustration, uh, expressing a whole way of looking at the world that I couldn't imagine.

Q: And hepcat whiteboys too.

A: Yeah, I guess so, but I wasn't even aware of that. And I felt that it was so natural to listen to the blues for me in the '50s, and feel that this had much more to do with me than Rosemary Clooney.

Q: Yeah. I remember seeing Elvis on TV, 1956, and I had just seen *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the original version with Kevin McCarthy with this lunatic look at the end. And Elvis had that same look...

A: Ha!

Q: ... plus *something* else. And after that my parents could never pick my clothing for me, and never again would they tell me what haircut to get. And I was just a little creep of 11, and I found so much power in that, y'know, that I can't imagine today's kids can derive from the pablum that they listen to.

A: Well, there's no reason for the break anymore.

Q: But it's more than that, I think it's also like what was once this liberating music is now, more than anything, the absolute voice of the status quo.

A: No question. And the voice of commercial exploitation as well.

Q: Do you listen to current stuff at all?

A: No. What I do listen to, and I don't listen to any of the so-called New-Age stuff either, which I think is the ultimate in computopian lobotomy, but I do listen to what is happening with, again, going back to what I like to think of as Third World music — the kind of hybrids that are coming out of the Jamaican experience and the whole Caribbean thing, and then the urban blacks and what they're doing with jazz, fusing with that, a lot of stuff that's coming out of, uh, what we have here is 92.5, it's a black-run station that has moved beyond Sam and Dave semi-lightyears into lots of new stuff. And not just rap music, which is kind of the ultimate verbalization, but really the kind of interesting rhythm where Hispanic rhythms are merging with black rhythms. That's what I listen to now.

Q: No Springsteen or Michael Jackson?

A: Nah. I never could listen to Springsteen, I never did understand beyond, for instance, if you're gonna listen to Springsteen, you should listen to George Thorogood. I mean, listen to something which has some real roots to it, you know what I mean?

Q: Well, Springsteen is a guy who for one thing is operating for an audience that doesn't know the difference between the '50s and the '60s — both decades are before their time.

A: Exactly. He's synthesizing it in a way for them.

Q: In a way that honors neither the '50s *nor* the '60s.

A: That's exactly right.

Q: Like how did you, you started promoting this stuff, when was that, '67?

A: No, actually the first thing I got involved in was with a local promoter, a friend of mine named Jim Pagni, while I was still in high school, I told you the story of the Cadillac limo [which I, the author, have forgotten]. Well, in '62, '62 or '63, he brought in a new group from L.A. called Ike and Tina Turner and their Revue. Well, it knocked my socks off. I think he paid them about \$1100, the first dance they came down here. I still have their album from those days, the first one they put out. And then we took Dobie Gray and the Drifters out to El Centro and Yuma, to the county fairgrounds in those two places, in '63 and '64.

Q: It didn't at the time strike you as something you wanted to *play*? You didn't want to be a musician?

A: Uh no. I had 6 months of piano lessons when I was a kid. And I could read music, to this day I can read music, but it didn't feel like I had a natural affinity for it. What I had an affinity for was, in those days, was really trying to get these guys organized enough to get the gigs, ha, and to take care of the money side of it and to — because they were musicians and artists and I wasn't. My art was to provide an infrastructure of organization so that the artists could be where they should be, all at once, with their equipment, ha ha.

Q: Did you ever get in on the studio end of it?

A: Yeah. I produced a record in '63 or '64, for Little Ron and the Esquires. We went up and bought studio time and we did a record, put it out on our own and it got on, local black radio stations played it.

Q: They were black?

A: Little Ron was black, the rest of the guys were white. And it was like this integrated band, a very unusual thing for San Diego in those days — as in *totally unique*! We had the only integrated band. The others, the Executives were all white, Sandy and the Accents were all white, the group that had "Listen to the Rhythm of the Falling Rain"

Q: The Cascades?

A: The Cascades. Who at the same time were playing a little bowling alley over here on 54th, they were all white. And they were all trying to cover black music but not really incorporating black musicians. So we really made a conscious effort to integrate and to play rhythm and blues, what we called it, and it was a harder-core, uh, it was to the Sandy and the Accents and Cascades-type bands as the Stones were to the Beatles. We would play Ray Charles, "What'd I Say," in addition to playing the current hits, "Louie Louie" and that sort of thing.

Q: Well, "Louie Louie" and a lot of that stuff, y'know the pre-British Invasion, early British Invasion days, was basically music made by innocents that could occasionally be *really* good and vulgar. Like you could always depend on there being a "Wooly Bully" or one of these tunes on AM radio a few times a year, and there isn't even that anymore, right? There's no more vulgar.

A: Because there's no more innocence!

Q: Heavy metal is too pompous to be vulgar.

A: There's no more innocence. And people have been reminded again and again that there may not be any more time for either vulgarity or innocence because they may have to worry where their next meal is coming from. And this has a chastening effect!

Q: Meaning, for bands, they'd better study the demographics of their audience, uh, and get regular gigs ... that if they're gonna be musicians, it has to be for profit at an early stage.

A: It's become like politics. The candidate is coiffed in and educated in the program to the fine tuning of what the polls tell the candidate's handlers the public wants to hear and see. And the rock group is packaged in the same way.

Q: Yeah, which is half of why it's all over. Anyway, in the *late* '60s, when you were doing shows at the time you were going to law school, that was at a point where finally American white bands were, uh, they were making a more vital music than the Cascades and whatnot had been making.

A: No question. In 1966, uh, '66 or '67, I was at Santa Barbara, a junior in college, and I got appointed as the head of all social programs of, like guest speakers, the concerts, the dances and the whole thing, the social program put on by the associated student body. And that year we spent about 175 thousand, which was about six times more than anybody'd spent on that campus to that point, real money in those days. And we did Ray Charles, the Doors, we did a concert with Cream right after their *Fresh Cream* album came out, we did the San Francisco bands the first time they'd been that far south. When Janis Joplin was with Big Brother, for instance, we had them together, we had Quicksilver Messenger Service, their first out-of-Bay gig was at Santa Barbara in '68, '67. And a whole list of 'em ... as well as some things I thought were interesting, Dave Brubeck and some other things like that, but I basically, after Monterey, after the Bop Festival where I got introduced to all those people, most of whom are now dead, I basically became *the* entrepreneur who was willing to take these people out of their *local* successful contexts — the Doors in L.A., the Airplane in San Francisco — and of course they were really starting to jump. I took them on these college tours where we, and Jim Pagni helped at the beginning, and then I got off on my own. And in '68, when I moved to San Francisco, we had about 85 colleges that we had done business with in terms of packaging groups and dances and concerts. Sometimes

we'd do them on our own in terms of promoting, other times we just sold them to the student bodies there, and it was a hectic, incredible business with tremendous ups and downs, uh, tremendous stress, and here I was going to law school, trying to do this, and I'm glad I was young when I, ha ha, there was tremendous energy involved.

Q: And at the same time there was an anti-war movement intersecting the music scene. To what extent did that enter *your* life?

A: Well, of course I was right in the middle of it at the time, I was right in that generation that was going off to war, and I was in the middle of a city that was having the, I think, the biggest impact on defining the opposition to that war — mostly from the left. The opposition being you shouldn't be involved in the first place, what the hell are we doing in the middle of a civil war, and the agrarian reformers like Ho Chi Minh were just simply nationalists and this communist bugaboo was nonsense. And I kind of was coming to it from the right, ha, I felt at the time that Ho Chi Minh was clearly just a puppet of Soviet colonialism and was going to be allowed to take over all of Vietnam as a colony of Russia, that if we were going to defeat that, we were gonna have to be a lot more hard-core about it than we were prepared to be. And if we were just in the war to fight out some Korea-type stalemate. I wanted no part of it.

Q: You didn't have any sense of the opposition basically being people who refused to be asked to *die*?

A: Oh yeah, oh sure, there were lots of people for whom there was really nothing worth dying for. And I felt that was the ultimate bankruptcy of the human spirit. If you have nothing in your mind that's worth dying for, then you might as well die yourself.

Q: Well, essentially they didn't wanna die on the dotted line.

A: Yeah.

Q: So you had some sympathy for that root of opposition?

A: Yeah I did. I knew all those people, I was involved of course in the law school, we shut down the law school in the Cambodian bombing. I was president of the third-year class when that happened, we chanted, "Give peace a chance!" on the steps of, it was the first time the school had been shut down since it started, it was the oldest law school west of the Mississippi. And I had a great feeling that merged, I

mean the left and right merged by 1970, but the feeling that whether you were opposed to the war because you thought we shouldn't have been there in the first place or you were opposed to it because you were pissed off at the fact that we were in it, that an American president was having American boys die in a war that he was unprepared to win for the first time in our history, whichever angle you were coming at it from, you were arriving at the same logical conclusion: This war is not worth fighting in, it's not worth dying for.

Q: You didn't think that Johnson in sending *hundreds of thousands* over there wanted to win? Or just didn't know tactically how?

A: Oh, he clearly did not want to win. In my view. I could be *historically* wrong. I'm just stating what my view was at the time. That it was clear to me that he had lost his nerve, he didn't know what winning meant, and he wasn't prepared tactically to achieve it. But I'm really a student of history and there's no, and as Clausen would say, there's no small wars. If you're gonna get into a war, and of course that's the big question of whether Jack Kennedy would've gotten us into the war, but I think he'd have won it. If you're gonna get into a war, you don't get into a war for a stalemate or a loss. Because the problem is not that war, that's not the issue. The issue is then the adversary you have to face in the next ten wars, because the Soviet Union was nothing but emboldened and, uh, and certainly *enriched* by the experience of taking on the United States of America and its troops directly through proxy forces and beating us.

Q [too slow on the draw to notice the contradiction between "directly" and "proxy," and too possum-playing polite to observe that he must mean Clausewitz (Karl von; 1780–1831; author of *Vom Kriege*)]: But did you have these specific, uh, did your politics have this specific shape that early?

A: Yeah, it did.

Q: 'Cause to some extent I'm guessing that you have an emotional tenor which — you're a macho guy — and that to some extent a lot of this can be seen as an extension of your *feelings*. More than your reading of history and letters. Is this possible?

A: Well, it's possible. I mean, let others do the psychoanalysis. But I've been a student of history.

Q: I'm wondering, though, if your reading since then, if your intellect has caught up with your hormones and heart — or if you're saying that they were already neck and neck at the time.

A: Well, I think they were neck and neck. I was as emotional as any other person of age 20, y'know, vitally committed and idealistic and youthful in every sense of the word. And if we could have a. I'm completely in sympathy with the notion that if we could have a world without war, for instance through the application of a real understanding of the ecology, of the planet, it seemed to me that was a higher plane to get all the human race onto than the plane we had been on for several hundreds of thousands of years. And then what I really got caught up in, rather than the war movement one way or the other, although I subsequently worked for Pete McCloskey, who was trying to unhorse Nixon in '72 ... but before that, in '69, I got caught up in the environmental movement. And this was really my great passion, because I felt that an understanding of the natural environment, the ecology of the planet, would inevitably lead to a much more sophisticated vision of the role of the human race, the role of the planet itself within the greater universe, than the kind of silliness, when it came right down to it, of different kinds of human beings fighting each other, ha! There were a lotta larger truths involved.

Q: Was this at the time of the first Earth Day, or maybe the only Earth Day?

A: Right, the only Earth Day, yeah. And it triggered, got triggered by something that happened very close to home. Right after I'd left Santa Barbara and I went back to see it, there was the big blowout of the oil platform in Santa Barbara. And that, because I'd known the beaches so intimately, I'd surfed all the beaches, I dove in the channel, I was out to the Channel Islands, I knew the area like the back of my hand and loved it *because* of its natural beauty. And to see the oil companies have the gall to say it was their right, and to search for oil so we could run our stupid cars, to destroy *that*, a priceless resource that had taken millions and millions of years to evolve, just seemed to me to be absolute nonsense, and I went on the warpath. I was a, an activist, truly an activist in the environmental movement. I joined a bunch of organizations, I was in on meetings, I spent a great deal of time on it, and I got appointed by Wally Hickel, who was Secretary of the Interior under Nixon in the first administration, to the Student Council on Pollution and the Environment — SCOPE — which was kind of an advisory group on this whole new activism. And I became an intern to the president of the Sierra Club in 1970 and worked on lawsuits, the first environmental lawsuits in the state. I helped marginally, very marginally, in the drafting of some of the language that went into the 1972 Coastal Initiative and got involved in the political expression of these environmental values, and that's really what dominated my own thinking at that point. It still has a tremendous role in my

thinking now. If you're gonna get beyond war, the way to do it, it seems to me, is a greater recognition of the futility and stupidity of it — ha ha! — in the context of ecology.

Q: And looking back, do you think that *any* corners have really, significantly been turned to reverse the way the environment has been treated in the larger scheme?

A: Unfortunately no, there's probably a J-curve at work here, as the economists would say. As we discover the first part of our predicament, we get even worse news, because we discover the rest of it. I think from the standpoint of what we felt happened to the birds because oil was covering their feathers in 1969, we now know that ozone is being depleted from the atmosphere. The level of threat that we're talking about has increased so much that I think we're only beginning to realize the seriousness of the impact on man, and the probable self-extinction if we don't do something much more drastic than we've been doing. I think our turn to an information society in the use of computers and away from the gross waste of natural resources to produce industrial products is probably the first inkling of a trend to survival which I think obviously mankind will turn to. I mean, we will not allow ourselves to become extinct. So I think there's — this is too Marxist perhaps! — but there's an inevitability about that.

Q: See, like *my* view is that, uh, the poem I write about all this stuff is that the world has probably been over for some time now, that too many men have become machines — speaking of computers — and are no longer men, that their "survival" will just be a function of the nature of the mechanism as *it* changes, uh, to which they plug themselves, or are forced to plug themselves, in.

A: Huh.

Q: I think people have been terminally dehumanized, certainly "denaturized," and don't quite know it.

A: Well, but there's no survival value in that philosophy.

Q: But all I'm saying is it just makes different the types of necessities, the requirements for altering *its* course. It's different from dealing with people qua mammals. I think that people are no longer guided by their own nervous systems, uh, nearly as much as they used to be.

A: Oh, no question about that.

Q: I mean the days when rock and roll *could* work to be a liberating factor, because it worked *directly* on the central nervous system, I don't know that enough people *have* central nervous systems anymore.

A: Well, that's right, they've been augmented. Perhaps supplanted in your view. Well... I guess there's always two ways of looking at things. You can look at the world in a pessimistic way or you can look at it in an optimistic way. And, uh, if you think everything that happens is *good*, not in a Pollyannaish way, just in the sense that it's another way that you can reach out and expand your understanding and knowledge and so forth, then things are gonna work out, I really think. On the other hand, going back to the '60s left, doomsayers like Michael Harrington for instance, Michael Harrington's work would seem to indicate that by this time the world would be starving, there would be terminal warfare in all, if not, if nuclear annihilation had not already taken place, because of the intentions of the superpowers, and that socialism was the road to prosperity. Well, all three of those, that were commonly held assumptions of the '60s, are absolute hogwash in the 1980s, all three of them are absolutely wrong.

Q: Well, I think in fact that all three of them, certainly the first two, have been used by superpowers as scare contexts so that people swallow anything short of their own annihilation, their own impoverishment. If people are afraid of being nuked, afraid of starving, of another Depression, they'll accept a lotta shit, don't you think? That in fact every administration I can think of since these terms became currency has used them as universal scare tools...

A: No question about it.

Q: ... to the point where a lot of environmental, a lot of *industrial* complicity in the destruction of the environment is based on industrialists assuming *they're* gonna be nuked so let's profit now, right? It works on the whole clientele.

A: It certainly happens. But on the other hand, I think if you look at the kinds of, for instance the way chemicals were produced in the 1960s, and the sorts of things that were dumped in streams, it's not done anymore. Not in the United States.

Q: Really? That's news to me.

A: Well, the Cuyahoga River caught fire in 1969. You go back and look at the Cuyahoga River today, they're just not dumping there.

Q: That's the Cuyahoga River. What about all these toxic dumpsites leaking into water, into the gene pool?

A: No question. And that's the heritage of all the stupidity of those generations, but I mean are people still putting things in 55-gallon drums and dumping them in a landfill? They are not. Now, y'know the fact is that those kinds of chemical processes are resulting in a lot more recycling. The stuff that was put in 55-gallon drums we're now sophisticated enough to take out and put into new products ...

Q: Like into food?

A: We put it into food, for instance. Ha! Chickens, you know what a chicken is these days? Incredible, they never touch the ground anymore. I go to Mexico just to eat chicken, 'cause chickens that touch the ground impress me!

Next week: *[Thousands more wds. from Roger's lips! From the hip! A real trip!](#)*

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"Short and sweet with unhinged vocals and guitars"

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[David Batterson](#)

Interesting to read this now, as it shows that Hedgecock has always been a self-indulgent, narcissistic, egotistical, babbling hustler. Like with Rush, who knows if Roger even believes his own right-wing rants. He just knows what sells. And he obviously loves money more than God or country (or being Mayor). He's a nobody on radio these days, so now he's trying a con job lawsuit against the City because his wife's implant boobs got damaged from a sidewalk fall. And it's ruined their loving relationship? Huh? You mean he was only in love with her fake silicone boobs? Sounds like a "flimsy" marriage. And sounds like a shallow man.

April 20, 2017

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[Ken Harrison](#)

I remember this 1988 hard to follow diatribe on Roger, and always reflected that it was TK that wrote it. Thought my pal had gone wacko or something. But he was only mentioned in the piece. Good to know it wasn't him. And yes, still hard to follow and the Reader editors were nutso back then.

Sept. 29, 2018

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[David Batterson](#)

Hedgecock outdid Trump on the draft dodging during Vietnam. He was 4F for his acne! WTF? When I was drafted, I had a heart murmur. But they still took me (and I didn't fight it). I think, as in Israel, everyone should have to do military service. And NO phony 4F stuff backed by quack doctors paid with daddy's money, as some did.

Sept. 29, 2018

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[danfogel](#)

Just 1 small question. How would your idea of conscripted military service be paid for?

Oct. 1, 2018

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[David Batterson](#)

We paid for it before; we could do so again. Next question.

Oct. 1, 2018

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And exactly when was it that? Certainly not during WWII, as only about 10 million men were inducted during the war. Same goes for the Vietnam era, where statistics show that less than 9 million men served during the entirety of the era, from 1964–1975. The 18–24 age group has remained steady at between 25–26 percent for the last decade and a half. Based on birth rate over that time, that part of the population will increase steadily to over 30% in the next 2 decades. You can do the math. So let me rephrase my questions. As to your above reply, when was the last time we had between 18 and 22 million service members at any given time? As for my original question, given that 2019 NDAA, with a total budget of \$719 Billion, calls for a total of just over 1.3 million military personnel at a cost of about \$155 Billion just for those military personnel, how do you propose we pay for a military force some 15 times larger, requiring a DOD budget in excess of \$2.5 TRILLION, which, by the way, would be close to 50 of current GDP?

Oct. 2, 2018

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[David Batterson](#)

Well, it's not going to happen anyway. But remember that during conscription, military draftees got paid very little money. I recall how few \$\$ I got paid. So they would NOT get the same pay rate as the current members of our all-volunteer forces, but basically only a stipend like interns.

Oct. 2, 2018

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[danfogel](#)

So you're saying that all of those who volunteered for military service got paid more than those who were drafted? Interesting premise. And I'm not talking about highly paid military personnel. An E1 makes about \$1650 a month, which would be something like \$225 a month in 1968. I can remember my Dad saying that he got

something less than \$100 a month during his time in the Army during the Korean conflict. So you're correct in that aspect. Whether it is \$100 in 1951, \$225 in 1968 or \$1650 in 2018, entry level military personnel, which is what all of those conscripted teenagers would be, are always only paid a stipend. It's only those who become career military who can make good money. But the point is, that with an additional 15 to 20 million personnel above what we have now, that is still \$300 to \$400 BILLION more per year in just basic monthly stipends. When you add all of the expenditures to support those 15-20 million conscripts, you're still talking about a \$2+ Trillion DOD budget. So again, you're the one who said we paid for it before; we could do so again. So when was that and how can we do so again??

Oct. 3, 2018

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[David Batterson](#)

OK, you won this one. Have a cigar.

Oct. 3, 2018

- [Suggest removal](#)

[danfogel](#)

And therein lies your problem. It's never about winning or losing, at least for me. And I don't smoke. Never have.

And you still didn't back up your claim that we paid for it before and can do it again.

Oct. 3, 2018

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Best Of

Roger Hedgecock, revisited

in which the former mayor and the author continue their exhaustive inquiries into politics, rock and roll, and more.

Author

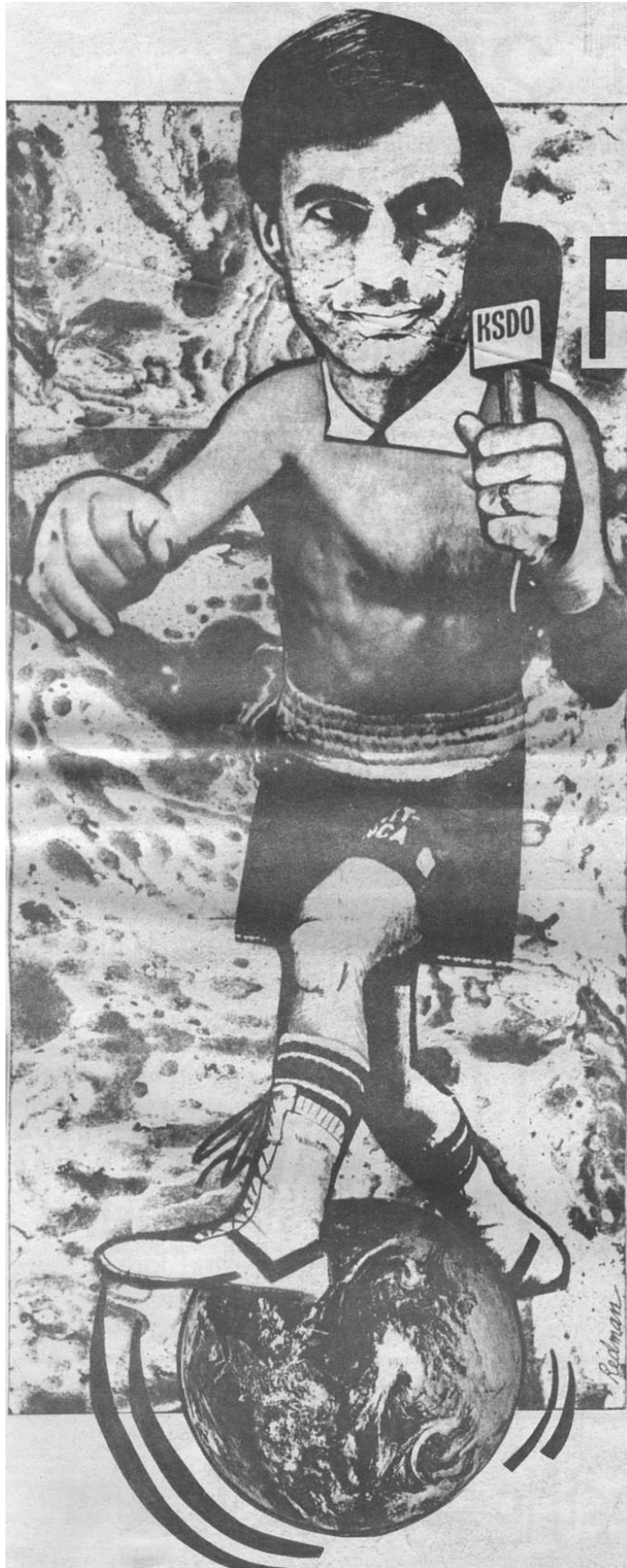
[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[March 31, 1988](#)

Cover Stories

Famous San Diego characters



T.K. Arnold, I've decided, is Roger's "youth guru," his culturedance steady lest he, Roger, lose not his youth.

When we left off last time, we were up at Roger's place, I was at Roger's place, the tape was rolling, and the two of us were just settling in to many hours of discourse, the first smidgen of which was in the process of triggering another, um, cogitation on my part....



ROGER RUMINATION NUMBER LUCKY 13: Mike Curb Meets Jerry Brown. (Jerry Brown Meets Mike Curb.) A draw.

Or forget the meets — the implied versus — imagine Jerry Brown as Mike Curb. Or Mike Curb as Jerry Brown.

HORATIO ALGER SLEPT HERE? — I take a leak, notice the downstairs crapper is as silent as the upstairs, and return to a whole lot more hours of talk and tequila, discourse and drink. Feels like some card games I've known ...



Q: Are you a card player?

A: No, not really.

Q: But you do play high-risk life stuff.

A: *Yeah*, I think you've gotta play close to the edge. Because otherwise why are you alive? You're not alive to be safe.



Q: But most people are.

A: Yeah, and I look at those lives and I think, gee. I'd be dying of boredom there. Forget substance abuse! Besides, I don't think there's anything you can't do.

Q: Well, there must be lots of things you can't do, but there's no reason not to aim for them.

A: Yeah! Exactly. What's the reason for holding back? I don't know that you ever get a chance to fulfill *all* that fantasy, but it's a good place to start. 'Cause obviously there's gonna be a lotta things you don't do in life, but I'd hate to look back and say that I didn't try to do a lot of 'em. I have, y'know, and this is a way of looking at life, I have a fear of heights. I can't get up on a tall building and look over the edge.

Q: Planes?

A: Planes are okay. They're moving. When you're looking over a building, that's something else. I went to Rockefeller Center one time and looked over, whew, vertigo.

Q: How 'bout the Empire State Building?

A: I was up the Empire State Building as well. But I did that because I pushed myself. If I'm gonna have this fear, then I've gotta confront that fear — what's the scariest I can get? Well, *almost* the scariest was last week when I went up on the, uh, parasailing in Puerto Vallarta. This is really bizarre, they put you in this harness, there's one little strap under your butt and a couple here and around here and a parachute. And the speedboat takes off, y'know with 800 feet or 1000 feet of line, and you go shooooo! Well yeah! And you're about 600, 800 feet up. I mean you're lookin' down and ... shit. And I just, I took a tape recorder and I taped myself talking about the experience. And we had to edit it a little before we put it on the air...

Q: Ha ha ha!

A: ... 'cause there was a lot of oohs and ahs. So I had a feeling on this height thing, it was just something, I couldn't analyze where it was coming from or why I have it, and it's gotten less over the years because I constantly challenge it. And it's a good thing, because things happen to you where you're happy to have challenged. I was

called upon the first couple months as mayor to fly to New York and present a big bond package on some downtown subsidized housing. We're selling bonds to representatives of the bond brokerage houses, top of the World Trade Center, elegant lunch, a podium, some curtains behind the podium. I'm introduced, I stand up, and while I'm being introduced, the waiter or somebody opens the goddam curtains. Well, the fucking view is that you're 19 miles above the pavement of Manhattan, the Statue of Liberty is about three inches high down in the harbor, and I just went "What?!?" And I had to turn my back on that and stand literally within a foot of the glass, where the podium was placed. And talk, forgetting about what was behind me, and I was able to do that, because I pushed myself, and made the deal, we got the lowest interest rate they ever got on that series of bonds for that housing. It probably had nothing to do with me, but still I took full credit. No, we did pretty well.

Q: I hear also you did pretty well in, you had this paper route and you actually spent the money you made on like property or something ...

A: Well, I bought a *house*.

Q: You bought a house! At what age?

A: Seventeen.

Q: Rather than buy 9000 records or whatever else a teenager might buy, you bought a house.

A: Yeah. My dad had come to Long Beach in 1922 and had watched L.A. grow and never bought it. "I never had any money," he said. "I had a milk route, it was the Depression. It was ten cents to the acre, but who had ten cents?" And I heard these stories, I was determined never to fall into that trap. Because I saw people around me who had no other smarts except that they had put a couple hundred bucks down on a house, an apartment building, commercial building, what have you, and had enough money to be comfortable if they never made another risk or intelligent, or *any* decision for that matter, the rest of their life. That early determination got watered down with a lot of other things that happened to my life, so I never did pursue it, but I did buy a house when I was 17. In Ocean Beach, it was an old concrete blockhouse, and I would spend weekends trying to figure out why plumbing didn't work and how wiring worked — and learning a lot. And I got interested in architecture actually and that's how I got into, my dad had been an architecture student for one year at the University of Cincinnati, and he had old architecture books and I got into those. And all of a sudden I'd opened up another

door where I was, y'know, rummaging around exploring this alternate future, and I really always have since then. I've done a couple of projects where I got a partner in some company, some smaller projects, and I still own two condominium units, and then this house — I never really got big time on the issue. But enough that I really got into, y'know, what is habitable housing, what is aesthetic housing, what can you do to produce affordable housing, how do you incorporate solar power into — all of the condos we did were solar-powered, first time in San Diego.

Q: But for like 17, that's the kind of acquisition which is very level-headed. I mean you didn't buy a Cadillac, or a record collection or ...

A: Right. I didn't wanna be poor when I was older. My folks had been poor. My grandparents had been very poor. My dad had polio when I was a kid, we were on welfare for a while, every dime meant something. And I wanted to be a person that I could lose a few dimes, I could give a few dimes away, I could — not that I ever wanted to be rich for riches sake, but I wanted to have enough money that I never had to worry like *that* anymore. Y'know, it wasn't so compelling that I had to have millions — 'cause I certainly never ever got anywhere near that — but it was compelling enough that I never wanted to be poor. And, uh, and I worked hard for that money on the paper route, that's damn hard work for a kid.

Q: Which paper?

A: It was the *Union*. It was the only paper in town. And I got up real early in the morning and I worked damn hard before school and I don't mind being proud of that. I never brag about it, it's not a thing that's trotted out every time I talk to my sons, y'know the old thing about "If only you'd worked as hard as I did," ha. I'll never do that. But the thing is I worked very hard and I accumulated all of \$1500, and it took me about four years to do it.

Q: And that's all it cost?

A: In those days, in San Diego, that was a ten-percent down payment plus escrow fees for a house in Ocean Beach. And when I sold that house, actually years later, I had enough money to buy this house, which I thought I'm paying a fortune — \$57,000. In 1973. And I had to have a partner to really swing it, because I didn't have enough money at that. And then we did all kinds of work ourselves to try to bring it, it was a boarding house. It was real run down, it was a lot of work to try to bring it back. Then my partner got killed in a bike accident.

Q: Bicycle?

A: Bicycle. And I had to go through the trauma of, he got hit by a truck. So, to make a long story short, my wife and I over the years since then have restored this house and renewed it to the point where it's pretty impressive now. But it's only because we've done it on a very cheap basis. But, yeah, I don't know "level-headed," I mean it was, I was a very serious kid in a way.

I said, "Now look, if I have any smarts at all, if it *means* anything to be smart, I'm gonna listen to my dad, and I'm gonna learn the things he kind of missed a little bit. I'm gonna improve on them" — ha. I'm not sure I've succeeded by the way — but that's why I made the move. I didn't wanna, y'know, miss out on the real estate boom that was obviously coming to San Diego as it had to L.A. As it turns out, I missed out on almost all of it because all I ever did was buy two little pieces of property, ha ha ha. But had I done that, had I followed that route, and I know many people in San Diego today who live extremely comfortable lives who have no particular merit in life except that they vigorously pursued this notion, that buy ten percent down, hold two years and sell, uh, that they could make a ton of money. And a number of millionaires today got there with that theory.

RUMINATIN' RHYTHM — So I'm thinking, well, there are three basic flavors of privileged whiteboy grownup in the current U.S.A.: hipster, square, and (of course) yuppie. Roger — natch (and no mean feat!) — is ALL THREE.

Spit

pit (not a

pit)

pat

in the sense that — Samuel Beckett, "Rururing"

THE RULING ICONOCLAST — So it keeps goin', don't mind my epigraph, I'm just trying to tint/tinge/dye/stain/color things. You notice, by the way, that I haven't once referred to Roger's dwelling as "The House That Nancy Hoover Built"? (I hope you've noticed.) Anyway: not a millionaire, nor a millionaire *Republican*, Rog' says the word and I pounce on it...

Q: See, I've always thought, uh, for a long time I didn't exactly know what I wanted to think Republicans *were*, uh, vis-à-vis Democrats, y'know, whatever *they* were, and it's only in the last few years that it's seemed to me Republicans tend to have more affection for the so-called ruling class as such than Democrats, whatever a ruling class can be, uh, they're more "aristocratic" ... no?

A: Well, maybe, I mean you can certainly look at Bush and Dupont and those people as being quintessentially Republican in that case. I think I started out being more a Barry Goldwater type, iconoclastic. I walked precincts for Goldwater when I was 18 years old as a, uh, anti-establishment deal. And Barry Goldwater, if you know him at all, is a very anti-establishment guy. Very iconoclastic, very individualistic. And that has been papered over with the right-wing image, but in truth the guy is a, in a sense, a throwback to a very individualistic age. But also in the sense of something we need more of, which is to challenge authority. I think he was the first guy I knew of whose campaign was to kick out the whole Eastern establishment and, uh, and start over, in terms of politics. He didn't buy *any* of those guys and never did.

Q: Eastern? I'm Eastern.

A: Rockefeller.

Sponsored

Q: Oh, that. Eastern Republican.

A: Rockefeller, Scranton, Henry Cabot Lodge, etc., etc., etc.

Q: Mayflower descendants.

A: Yeah. If you're talking about ruling class, Goldwater was *essentially* anti-ruling class.

Q: He was a former Jew!

A: He was an outcast. His grandfather started...

Q: Reagan, on the other hand, is a former Irish Catholic, he was an O'Regan. His father or grandfather or somebody decided to pass for British by dropping the O and adding an a.

A: I don't know, I don't know his family roots. Reagan is not an authentic. Goldwater was an authentic. Unfortunately Goldwater is senile these days.

Q: I can't remember his name, but the manager of Country Joe and the Fish, he had worked for Goldwater, too.

A: Oh, I know him, oh! And we talked about that, he said, "Yeah." Oh boy oh boy, how many years have gone by! But a lot of people worked for Goldwater, and a lot of people who found themselves in basic rebellion in the '60s, uh, not everybody was from the left. There was a rightwing rebellion too.

Q: Well, I'm told you've had your moments of leftist acquiescence, uh, that you were perceived as, if not "liberal," at least a flexible, politically tolerant non-party sort of guy.

A: Oh, yeah. I've always been non-party. I mean parties ceased having a defined philosophical relevance probably 75 years ago.

Q: But wasn't the fact that you found Republican support for some of the things you wanted to do in these parts close to a miracle?

A: Oh, that's all hog wash. The leaders of the Republican Party always viewed me as they viewed Goldwater on the national scene. I was far too independent, far too iconoclastic for them to handle gracefully. But the rank-and-file Republicans, I never won an election where I didn't, and I won *all* my elections and I won 'em with a substantial, solid base of rank-and-file Republican voters. That's where I did my best, in Republican communities and precincts. And I always did pretty well in the Democratic areas too, not as well, but a good majority.

Q: But I mean you were once perceived as being somewhat non-rightwing, if not quite left.

A: Couple things contributed to that. Number one, I had a personal tolerance for everybody. I was the first person that could really talk to gays, I didn't have any problem. I just said, "I want your money, I want your votes, whudda you want?" — I was the first person that even dealt with them on a very upfront way in terms of politics. Um, I think I was the first, really around here, even though the parties are pretty weak, I was the first person who said, y'know, "I don't wanna be a mayor for the downtown establishment, I don't wanna be a mayor for the developers, I don't wanna be a mayor for the Republicans or the Democrats." My slogan was "I'd like to be a mayor for all San Diego" — so I went after everybody.

Q: Today, though, you seem to be perceived as having become more specifically, more *exclusively* rightwing since doing the show.

A: Oh, a couple of things contribute to that. First of all, I can be more real with people in this sense, that the show stems, and first of all let me back up to say that part of the liberal reputation also came from the environmentalism, which was viewed as an attack on private property by many Republican leaders in the early '70s, Pete Wilson was in fact viewed as a radical because of his controlled-growth views. So there's that theory, the developers' link to the Republican establishment is so strong that environmentalism of even the mildest kind is seen as very leftwing.

Q: But Pete Wilson, far as I know, never seemed as "existentially" real as you, and therefore...

A: No. It was a pragmatic thing on his part just to get elected. But the thing with the talk show is, I haven't changed my views. The thing is I feel a little freer to be tough with people, particularly the ones I like the best. I'm being very tough right now on gay people because I think they cannot continue to be as irresponsible as they're being. And their friends have to tell them.

Q: Yeah, yeah, but c'mon, they're such an easy target.

A: No, not really. I don't look at it that way anymore, I mean I'm not looking at targets. In a sense, you can say it's easy to attack the bathhouses or be down on the Gay Pride parade and say, "Why don't you have an AIDS Awareness parade and get a little more responsible and stop flaunting a lifestyle that's causing you to flicking kill yourselves and everybody around you, let's get a little more ..."

Q: I don't know. I'd say 100% of the gay people that I know haven't had sex in three years. They've been scared to death since...

A: Well, that's not true down here. There are five bathhouses where guys are talking about, openly talking about having free sex, they don't give a shit.

Q: You don't think they use rubbers?

A: That's what they say they should, *sure*. So, y'know, this is what I'm trying to deal with.

Q: Do a show from a bathhouse.

A: Oh God, go down and camp in front of one of the, interview people that come out and go ... ha!

Q: Yeah.

A: *Anyhow*, I have not changed my views but I have changed, uh, and I guess I'm kind of reveling in this new freedom, to be able to talk about issues that come up without having a *little* bit of a sugar coating politicians inevitably put on things because they don't wanna offend people and they don't wanna lose votes. I don't give a shit about losing votes anymore, so I'm gonna talk pretty real-time to people. Particularly those I care about or have some concern about.

Q: If not votes, ratings?

A: They matter, sure.

Q: Aren't you ever a little more forcibly articulate about some of this stuff than, uh, to maintain a hit show?

A: No, I don't think it, no. I mean I don't see it the way others could. The way I see it is. I'm a little freer to be more real with people than I have been in the past for reasons of wanting to be polite, or "politic" if you will. And I am concerned about the people I like the most, I mean environmentalists for instance. I was just ripping the local environmental community because they're supporting a so-called growth, inner-growth ordinance, which purports to put a lid on building permits in order to slow down growth but in effect, after you read all the exceptions, has a higher building-permit level for this coming year than were issued all of last year. So it's not even a limit, and they're being sold this bill of goods. So I've been tough, but I don't think I've changed my position. I've been tough, but things *have* changed.

I mean, AIDS has changed the position within the gay community, well, it's just a matter of necessity. The growth thing is changing all the time. Is the answer to growth more taxes to build more roads so we don't have traffic jams and they allow another million people to live here? That's the current plan. It's a disaster. Anyway, I don't think I've changed. Others can say that and I have to accept the logic, because you don't know yourself as well as maybe somebody who's been watching you for a while. But I don't think I'm more conservative or more liberal than I ever was, because I don't respond well to those labels. I'm *perhaps*, in the newfound freedom, and maybe it's part of the success of the show,

I have a back doorway, uh, expressing more bluntly what I feel, invoking a lot more backlash, certainly, than sugar-coating the message, and maybe that's good for the ratings and it's good for the show. Something's good for the show because a lot of people are listening, ha.

THE PHYLLIS DILLER CONNECTION — Okay, some comic relief. But not as comic as could've been. You know those transcendently over-the-edge, over-the-top, over-the-rim-of-the-universe type solos on certain later John Coltrane albums where after going far fucking *out* on all these incredible limbs at the edge of the frigging Void he suddenly at the end of a passage will throw in these contextually conservative *notes* as if to announce that we're still — ta ta! — in the safe-sane land of the Harmonic? Well watch, here, the way Rog' gets the ol' postcultural noose on a famous lame culture-neck only to *let go*. (Phsaw!) We're ALL in showbiz on *this* silly bus, I reckon ...

A: Ha ha. I did it a different way with Phyllis Diller. I had Phyllis Diller on, I've had a lot of people on. Phyllis Diller was fun because we talked about reconstructive surgery, we got into, y'know, all the times she's changed her nose, and then beyond that I said, "Look, you've built a public persona that's a real fake. It has nothing to do with Phyllis Diller the real person." She says, "Right" — there was no Fang, there was no ... we went through the whole thing. So we get down to, and I say, "What do you do to relax? How do you get the stress of doing what you do and being who you are out of your system?" "Well," she says, "I have a secret that men usually don't know about. A lot of women I find do this. I *soak*, I don't bathe, I soak in a bathtub a minimum of 30 to 40 minutes a day." And I said, "Really? That's not so special, I mean a lot of people take baths," and she says, "Nuh no. I soak and I have no artificial light on." I say, "What kind of light do you have?" She says, "Well, I have a candle." "That's fine, and what else do you do?" "Well," she says, "I pray. I have this particular prayer that I say every day." So I say, "Well, if you don't mind, would you like to recite this prayer?" She says, "No I don't mind at all." And it's a really nice Universalist kind of I'm-hoping-for-peace-love-and-happiness kind of prayer. And so I got down to the essence of a woman whose comic abilities are fairly superficial and found out that her *core being* was fairly superficial!

Q: Yeah!

A: But no one's ever taken that journey before, uh, that I've heard, and it was really kind of terrific.

Q: To deconstruct American comedy, if you wanna use those terms.

A: Sure. And I had some fun doing that, and I found this is maybe a skill I didn't know I had or at least I hadn't exercised before. Because I've always been the guy *in* the arena getting analysed, getting questioned, getting second-guessed, getting whatever. Whether you're a comedian on stage or a politician running for office, you're the person in the arena. Now I'm not the person in the arena anymore, and I'm having an interesting time commentating, exploring, questioning, second-guessing — a very interesting time.

Q: Has your persona as a commentator evolved?

A: I think so. Because at the beginning, what, almost two years now, I was still in the role of, it was the only role I ever knew in life — the participant, the direct warrior, the actor, the contact, y'know life as a physical contact sport. I was, that was all the roles I had. I was a trial lawyer, I was a rock-and-roll promoter before that, I was an elected official, I was on the point. Now, uh. I've gotten out of that, but I haven't lost an appreciation for what that means. I have not only a real sympathy — "sympathy" is not a great word — I have an *empathy* for what it means to be in the kind of, in direct contact. Because nobody realizes that when you're out there, psychologically, as that kind of person, you're working without a net at all times. So when Phyllis Diller walks out on stage, she's working without a net. When I go out and make a speech, running for office ...

Q: But she's working without a net in a very predictable avoidance-of-falling way. Not necessarily her, generically, but her, Phyllis Diller.

A: Huh uh.

Q: She's not the risk taker you are.

A: Oh, sure she is. You know what her real story is? She's a copy person at an Oakland radio station in want somebody to write funny lines for the news guys 'cause the ratings are for shit. And she starts writing these lines and she realizes she's pretty fucking funny. And so pretty soon they get her to do little bits and they stick the bits into the news things that they're doing. Pretty soon, somebody over in San Francisco picks up these bits and says, "Come over to the hungry i" — or whatever the hell it was, some club in San Francisco — "and start the show one night and say some of your funny bits." And that's how it started, she had four kids at home and a second husband who she soon junked, y'know, and she's had two or three since then. I mean this is coming from...

Q: So wait, you're saying that having encountered her, in spite of having deconstructed her, you ultimately respect her *more*?

A: Oh, of course. Absolutely. I think I got her to reveal, because I knew — not because I knew the facts but I knew the psychology — where she had been psychologically in terms of the risks she had taken. I mean, shit, that's a world war, to go through that and gain your self-defined success. And I've *done* that — ha, on a smaller scale — and I appreciate that. So unlike another commentator who's always been a commentator — I mean if you've always been Sam Donaldson, you've never been the president, ha ha! I mean you can always be an asshole and be Sam Donaldson, but you could never get the president, if you haven't *been* president, to come out.

Q: But for Christ sake, you're realer than Sam Donaldson.

A: Oh yeah. I am. I've interviewed Sam Donaldson and I know that to be a fact! Sam Donaldson is a small-town high school smart aleck, and he's never gotten over it. And he's just smart enough, and smart-alecky enough, to have caught a lot of attention by asking these obnoxious questions. But they're not very in-depth, they don't draw out any real knowledge. They serve mainly to try to embarrass or pickle the object of his questioning. I don't think it gets anybody anywhere.

THE TEETH OF GOD — A thousand pages ago I was wondering aloud like a dumb neophyte "who Roger is," as if it mattered more than what he *said*. Now here we both are, he's saying and I'm saying, and who (I could easily be wondering), who in heck is the "I" that's saying *my* stuff? Obviously I'm charading as this, that, the other — like watch me, for the next few minutes, play the stooge and tickle the guy's self-image in search of dunno ...

Q: You like power, right?

A: Ha!

Q: Of course?

A: I don't like power for power sake.

Q: But you've...

A: Oh, I enjoy using power to effect, uh, as we all do. You brush your teeth, it's a use of power. Uh, I enjoy using power for the kinds of things I wanna see get done. Hell, who doesn't?

Q: But there must be moments when you enjoy the angle of alteration in somebody's spinal column, or their mindset, based on something you've done or said.

A: Ha ha ha ha ha!

Q: Aw, come on, you're too modest.

A: What's funny about that is people have I guess thought that I was just built on this notion of ego-gratifying power exercises, but I honestly ...

Q: I don't mean so much ego gratification as you the artist, y'know, just on a camera-angle level seeing the result of, uh, the vectors of your control.

A: Well, there's a satisfaction, but I think I've successfully steered clear of the sickness that arises from *too much* ego satisfaction. But certainly, there's obviously a satisfaction. If I can get, now here's a practical deal here, okay, if I can get the people of the city to realize that they don't have to expand and should not expand — (knock knock knock) — as the new mayor is proposing a billion and a half dollars to increase the capacity of our sewer system to clean up the water before we throw it away in the ocean, I will have accomplished, ha, using power!

Q: What are the options to deal with sewage? I don't know them.

A: Well, one of 'em is you recycle the water you've already brought from 400 miles away and stolen from somebody off the Colorado River, and you use it over again instead of cleaning it up and throwing it away in the ocean — that's at least one. The other one is you don't use so much water to start with that's gumming up the — I mean we use water as if there's no end to — and you don't, and maybe this is the final irony of the thing, have a stated political rhetoric of growth management and growth control in the name of environmental sanity and protection and then turn around and nick everybody a billion and a half dollars to build a sewer treatment system whose capacity can only be justified by more growth.

Q: See, I'm assuming from things I hear here and there that your mayor might be less than great...

A: Ha ha!

Q: ... but I don't know anything she's done. I just hear these things. I also hear that from just the setup, a mayor is not empowered to do as much as mayors are in other cities.

A: Right.

Q: So is it possible that just in terms of the physics of the situation, uh, that you're as powerful from where you currently are as a mayor could be anyway?

A: Oh, people have said that.

Q: So that must feel okay.

A: Well, not only okay, but considering the circumstances, it's like a bolt out of the sky. I learned it happened when the station calls me the week before I'm finally forced to resign and says, "Look, if the worst happens, I want you to think about a radio talk show." I said, "A what?" I mean it was like *deus ex machina*, y'know, something just came out of the sky and lifted me up onto something else while I was falling off the cliff! In other words, what I'm saying is I haven't gone through an appreciation of my own *fine talents*, ha ha ha! I've gotten there because somebody gave me a break that came out of the blue and, uh, y'know, thank God, I've done something ...

Q: It's nice when it happens.

A: Exactly! I sure as hell couldn't count on it, nor could I, y'know, so I have a fine appreciation for the fate aspect of this whole thing. I'm doing this radio show because it was dropped on me, ha, like there was a seagull up above me or something, and it's funny, the political thing happened the same way. I just decided one day, I was kind of, I mean I was practicing law and I was just representing a lot of citizen groups, kind of dabbling in community politics, and then everybody was down on this incumbent supervisor but none of the politicians, none of the people who would be the logical people to challenge him, were willing to do it. And I just got kind of pissed off and I thought, well, this guy Conde's gotta go and nobody else has any, has the guts to do it, so y'know *I'm gonna do it*. It was kind of one of those things! And then all of a sudden, y'know, it *worked* — and I don't know at the beginning that I meant it to work.

Q: But do you also, is there a sense that in order to be “who you are today” — karma and such shit — you had to *lose* your mayoralty, in order to actualize what you’ve become?

A: Well, with the necessary precondition that it was certainly not a desired one or preplanned, ha, I mean it’s obvious that it was a necessary precondition I would not be who I am today had that not happened, but I certainly didn’t plan it that way. In fact, I guess I can say throughout my life I haven’t planned *any* of this stuff, I mean life has been like, uh, throwin’ things and the whole game is like one of those, y’know I’m on the other end of the gallery here at the county fair and the BB’s keep comin’ at me, ha, and there’s a question whether I can turn this into anything good or not — or fun or creative or interesting.

Q: But is any of your current take on things, uh, is there any, y’know, “When the going gets rough, the rough get going” — like a counterpuncher?

A: Well, I don’t know that I’d put it in that way, because it has a lot of images of some macho, ha, deal. I mean I don’t look at it that way. I look at it simply as Pete Alyward, this lawyer friend of mine, once told me in a campaign, he said, “I’ve never seen anybody who looked forward so eagerly to taking adversity and making it his friend.” And it’s true, whatever happened in the campaign, I would take the charges and just turn ‘em around. I’d be able to, to, as you say, counterpunch, but y’know just *countermove*, because too many people I know are just the opposite, they sort of feel like they’re reeds on the breeze and that, uh, they have to accept whatever happens to them but most of the things are gonna be bad. And I don’t think anything bad happens to you, I think just things happen. I saw a bumper sticker the other day, it said, “Shit happens,” ha ha ha! And I just think that’s, that’s life, it does, y’know, things happen to you. And the whole fun of it is, um, what happens to *you* after things happen to you — I mean whudda *you* do?

RUMINATION #2001: Scandal-ridden ex-mayors who not only do not skip town, who in fact have no intention of ever skipping, who keep a maximum local profile and even continue caring about their frigging burg’s *sewer system* are, are ... are certainly a TRIP, doncha think?

The universe is a void in which there is a dreamhole The dream disappears the hole closes.

— Allen Ginsberg, "Laughing Gas"

A FATE WORSE THAN GARV — So it's getting *late*, Jim, and we're still at it, talking 'bout, of all things, that cornfed junior nazzy S * t * e * v * e G * a * r * v * e * y and his likeliest post-Padre fandango. "I think," gibes Roger, "he was born for a political career, but I don't think he has any idea what that means." I second the mockout, and pursue with him the remnants of his own dwindling politi-whatsis ...

Q: But, um, *your* political career is not over.

A: Well, I think it's over.

Q: You actually do?

A: I don't, uh, maybe a combination of things tells me that. One is, I mean all the circumstances, whatever comes out of this appeal or what have you, I mean guys that have been convicted of doing something nasty about their campaign contributions are not likely to get elected again. And two, if you can be as powerful doing something that makes twice or three times or five times as much money, why go back to the first thing?

Q: It does?

A: Yeah.

Q: Five times as much?

A: No.

Q: Four?

A: No, ha, but more than twice.

Q: Okay! Well, anyway, uh, some people I've spoken to seem to see like classical, y'know, "tragic" elements in your political downfall. You look at it at all that way?

A: Well, the only tragedy is for democracy. No, it was pretty straightforward, I think it was pretty obvious what happened, and the tragedy is for democracy. I mean, people, the voters of San Diego, no longer have the democratic right to select their mayor.

Q: [looking 'round for violins a-playing an appropriate accompaniment, finding none — it must be the hour]: But do you feel it's to any extent personally tragic insofar as it occurred early, relatively early, in your political life?

A: No, I don't think, uh, that argues for sequential, a ladder, uh, philosophy of life that I don't think will exist outside some mythical corporate pyramid and, uh, y'know maybe it's, the way I view it in terms of the philosophy of it is it doesn't *matter* when it happened. It's totally irrelevant *when* it happened. I mean, Ray Kroc didn't make his first million dollars 'til he was 56. He sold blending machines, made pennies, the most he ever made was about \$35,000 a year, and he sold blending machines into his late 40s — on the road.

Q: Well, forget about *when*, isn't there something almost date-coded about, uh, isn't *anyone* who's a politician perhaps maybe "asking for trouble"? Isn't there something like walking in quicksand about the experience?

A: Oh, I took it more forthrightly than I think most people do. Most people take it to be, uh, *careful*. Being careful is the watchword — go along to get along. Those words might as well be inscribed on the, over the entrance to the House of Representatives and every other elected, y'know, democratic body in this country: "Be careful and you'll be okay." Life's too short for me, I don't care to be careful. I care more about being right and doing something meaningful rather than just putting in my time. And consequently it's extremely threatening, particularly in the decaying phase of American democracy, a particularly threatening attitude for an elected official to take. Because the spectrum of special interests is wholly unused to a, an elected official who can think for himself.

Q: But do you think that a lot of, uh, are there neophytes anymore entering the political arena who are actual rubes, I mean people who will take their pratfalls, uh, uh, who are just rubes about it? Or is everybody entering with caution?

A: Most people I see around here are entering it now with an extreme amount of caution because I'm the example that's held up to them — if they can't go along, they'll end up like me. I mean, unfortunately I've become, probably my greatest impact on the community now is a symbol of what happens if you, if you don't march in lockstep with the, uh, y'know underground and private but forcefully stated views of the publisher of the newspaper, the district attorney, and others who are standing behind them.

Q: I don't know what the deal is with your appeal or any of that, but do you have any *fear* of going to jail?

A: Well, it would be a very unhappy circumstance. Certainly I would fear going to jail — who wouldn't?

Q: Do you think about it, though?

A: No, I don't think about it, there's nothing I can do about it. One of the other self, uh, one of the other defense mechanisms is I, that little prayer about knowing the difference between things you can change and things you can't, knowing the difference between the two, and certainly I can't change or have any impact at this point on what the appeals court is gonna think of this appeal. It's entirely in the hands of my lawyer and the way he's putting it together, and I've had some input into that, but no, I don't think about it, but it's certainly, if asked the question, y'know "Are you afraid of going to...?" — well, certainly.

Q: You could do your show from there.

A: Well, that's what I've already told the sheriff. I've said, "That could bring a lot of good PR to you," and he says, "It's the last thing in the world I want is a radio show from *that* place," ha. But I certainly intend, and the station I think might back me up, to certainly appeal to the court if I'm gonna be spending any kind of incarceration at all, to be able to do the show.

Q: So you've already thought of it.

A: Well, sure. What else you wanna know?

Q: Well, okay, this is the last question, it's a down-and-dirty one that it's embarrassing to ask, uh, but I have to know to what extent, in what ways, your, quote, bad skin, uh, might have influenced any aspects of your life.

A: Well, it had tremendous influence on whether or not I went into the army, ha ha. I went down to the draft, y'know the induction center, the processing center, in Oakland three times 'cause my student deferment got lifted after college, in '68, and I was marching over to Oakland out of law school there, in San Francisco, I went over three times, y'know bend over, do the whole bit. And all three times they threw me out of there because my skin condition on my back was so bad that, uh, y'know they just couldn't take me.

Q: At what age did it break out?

A: Oh, I had this subcutaneous cyst syndrome, which is a rash of small cysts that covered the upper third of my back and my face and neck, and the upper part of my arms. And I was under medication for the thing about five years, and during that time — it's pretty well cleared up now and has been for some years, but it's obviously left scars ...

Q: How "defiant" has it made you about...

A: Y'know I'm gonna leave the psychoanalysis, uh, what the psychic, the psychological impact it's had, I have no idea. I mean, I don't think it's had *any* effect, but it might have, I don't know.

Q: Do you feel any lingering self-consciousness about it?

A: No, because it has, um, I mean the usual thing it does, you get pimples when you're a teenager and it causes you anxiety with, uh, with takin' out girls, and I suppose that happened in high school, but as time went on I never had a problem, heh heh heh, with girls being attracted to me, at least not in sufficient numbers that I ever felt deprived, and it's never been a, y'know, it's never come up in that context or any other that I've seen it as a *handicap* — maybe that's the best way to put it. I sure didn't like it, as anyone else did when they were in their teen years — what an embarrassing, humiliating thing to go through — but, hell, it saved me going to Vietnam, I can't be too down on it!

Q: Didn't you do that commercial for some skin, uh...

A: Yeah, I used to do it for a doctor in Tijuana that does these chemical face abrasions, and uh, but I wouldn't even have that done, I mean I basically did the ads for the, y'know the typical, your woman who wanted to peel away some of the wrinkles, discolorations out of her face, for cosmetic reasons — but I don't care.

Q: Well, good!

A: Yeah, I mean it doesn't make any difference to me, I look like how I look.

Q: Are there days when you develop a pimple...

A: Sure, yesterday.

Q: ... and you see it in the mirror and think *here comes trouble again?*

A: I get 'em fairly frequently, just little, uh, blackheads and whiteheads and so forth, and they come out occasionally and they go away. Once again, it's sort of just part of the equipment I have, ha, and I'm fairly comfortable with it. I mean people can take it or leave it.

Q: Good.

JUST 2 GUYS FINISHING OFF AN EVENING TALKING SOME MORE ABOUT AIDS — The tequila done, so are we. We make plans, or plan to make plans, for evening next, or the evening after that. How about Tijuana? — just a suggestion. Ain't been there since '69, so I figure, shoot, Mexophile Roger could show me a sampling of T-J to-day ...

Q: You could show me something vulgar.

A: God, there's not much left. Y'know when I was a kid we used to go down to Tijuana and, uh, when I was 14-15 years old there was still the old World War II, uh, real, incredible dives, y'know the legendary donkey shows, and Juicy Lucy and her 15 imitators.

Q: That's gone?

A: That's gone. Chicago Club used to have the world's longest runway. I mean all that crazy era of Tijuana is pretty much gone. I had a business meeting down there about six months ago and we all decided to go to dinner, and I was sort of reminiscing about some of these old things, which was kind of embarrassing to the Mexicans, who've been trying to not just be a place where the Marines go to get laid, y'know that type of legend or reputation, but build a real modern city, and they're to many respects succeeding. So, but afterwards we're talking, I say, "What kind of clubs you guys go to?" "Well..." Finally we went to a couple bars and had some drinks, nothing much, but then we finally went to, uh, a *whorehouse*. Which was all Mexican. And it was a bar, you walked in and it was a bar and a seating area, seating around the bar, and then you walked up a couple of steps back into an area where there were little cubicles. And it just scared the hell out of me, talk about a difference in, transition in generations, it scared the hell out of me to even think about touching one of those girls! It used to be adventuresome, "Gee, I don't wanna get the clap," or you wonder whatever, now it's "Christ, they must have AIDS" — I mean they can't possibly get by without having any AIDS. Because these girls were going, y'know, 20-30 guys a night. And my God, I had this awful feeling, if I had any

sexual desire... Shit, in the paper there's this story about some gal was picked up in Fresno for prostitution, they find out she has AIDS, she says, "Yeah, I know I have AIDS." "Why haven't you stopped?" "I've gotta make a living too." And when I hear this, I go *shoooo* — almost enough to drive you to chastity. Yeah!

Q: Well, it's in the Catholic tradition.

A: Yeah, it's a tradition I'm coming to late in life — but better late than never! Ha ha ha ha ha!

Conclusions to this point: none.

Actually, one. Don't think he's especially "evil." Not in the sense that Oliver North is evil (or Bob Hope or Bing Crosby). Or Tom Landry or Peter Ueberroth. (Or Mark Harmon for Coors.) Or the Dennis Hopper character in *Blue Velvet*. Or Nancy Reagan or Steve Garvey or Jerry Lewis. May not know who (what) he is — but I do know who (what) he ain't.

I even, huh, (in a sense) "like" the guy. He's the first interviewee I've encountered who's understood phrases like "ad hominem" and "a priori," and I can't imagine him sending someone to break my thumbs after he's read the piece (which, narcissisms aside, I'm sure he'll read *thoroughly*, though in two weeks he'll prob'ly recall me as "Metzger"). He just hasn't specifically *charmed me*.

Nothing ever was

Nothing is a house never bought

Nothing sits on nothing in a nothing of many nothings — a nothing king

— Gregory Corso, "Notes After Blacking Out"

THE ILLIMITABLE WONDER OF BEING — ...so I'm downtown buying beers, lots of beer, more than 30 different brands of imported. In the liquor store lot, these two cops ask, "Where's the party?" "At Roger Hedgecock's," I answer — a nice line to actually use in Context. Rub elbows w/ the famed and/or rich and/or powered — and a *payoff*.

"Well, haw, we'll be over later" — what a life. Some minutes later at Chez Hedge, however, Mrs. Hedge is somewhat nonplussed to hear it. About cops expecting parties (and conceivably knowing their coordinates).

"I don't think they really *believed* me," I assure her.

"I hope not." She does not seem easily assured.

Tijuana's fallen through, but Life goes on. A round-to-the-finish of "AM/FM — 30 Years of Rock 'n' Roll Trivia" — a board game — is our substitute, i.e., 2nd-choice, life Option. Arnold's idea — blame him. Well, I don't gotta blame him; I end up winning. But Roger, heh, Roger don't do so good.

Before we play, though, as this is perhaps the last I'll be seeing of dear Rog', I present him with a bk., a good bk., a fresh storebought copy of a damn good bk. — Charles Bukowski's *Women*. *Barfly* is about to be released so it's, y'know, topical. Before departing for her own life option(s) up the stairs — this time we're in the heavily wooded dining rm. — Mrs. Rog', no rock trivialist she, at least not an invited one, spots the thing and queries, "What's *this*?"

"You tell her," nudges Rog'. So I do; all the usual overblown great-American-unsung this/that/thetc. She examines it — cover painting of a "floozy" — flips pages, goes goggle-eyed at who knows which passage, declares, "I'll have to read it too." I hope she does.

OK. The players: Roger, me, KSDO talkguy (and former rock deejay) Stacy Taylor, rock photogman (and Arnold-Hedgecock Experience roadie) Bob White, T.K. Arnold. T.K., who I've decided is Roger's "youth guru," his culturedance steady lest he, Roger, lose not his youth (the ol' boy seems fairly secure, for the time being, in his ongoing possession of that) but his angle on youth as a concrete whatsis out in the world, an aspect of world product just beyond his current range of Major Concern, has brought umpteen packaged dips to go with my beers & Roger's chips.

The game. No reason to blow-by-blow the cheesy *game*. Every other question, it seems, involves the Moody Blues or Eric Carmen. And every question, every question *Roger* gets — even "Which group sang 'Jumpin' Jack Flash'?" — he gets wrong. "Christ," he mutters, "I'm outclassed all around." But no, there's plenty of stuff none of us know, for inst whatever band did "Sweet Thang" (Rufus? Aerosmith? Alabama?) or the *year* "Spiders and Snakes" was a O3 hit for Jim Stafford ('81? '76? '47?) — although yes, the former rock promoter does miss some especially easies,

total throwaway gimmes like "Secret Agent Man" (singer of) that have us *feeling sorry for him* — no other way to put it.

So we feed him clues, cues, we give him extra time — what're acquaintances for? — and finally he gets one. "What ex-member of the Stone Roneys recorded the album *Mad Love*?" "Stone Boney's??... I don't know ... oh, oh ... Linda Ronstadt?"

Three cheers! four cheers! — but his streak ends abruptly at one. The game goes on (and on) yet he never really does get in it. At one point he halfheartedly jests: "Hey, I was doing *important things* while these records were out." We courteously halflaugh, and he soon grows eerily silent, his face almost waxen in the high-watt overhead light...

Once, in the 7th or 8th grade, my mother sent me to school in spite of a nasty cold, which was usually not her habit, and for some reason I forgot to bring a handkerchief. I was able to hold it in for a period or so — all the nasal stuff — but then in social studies I just suddenly had to BLOW MY NOSE, and what was I to blow it in? I blew it in stiff, lined notebook paper, and what I couldn't catch with notebook (including dripping blue notebook lines) I wiped on my sleeve. And because I was making all this noise — blowers would ordinarily get to do it at home — I felt like the whole room was watching me, whether they actually were or not: blow and wipe ... pause ... blow and wipe.

There've been moments so far with Roger, I'm thinking, where I've felt every bit as uncomfortable, as conspicuous, as conspicuously uncomfortable. There may well have been moments where he's felt the same with me, but if so he's never once let on. He's *appeared* more at ease than I could EVER be. An "at-ease guy." But not now. This stupid game has got him nearly wincing.

He sips at a beer and says little. When he speaks, it's without bombast, oompah, of either import or transmission. Spotting dip on Arnold's collar, he tells him, "Wipe off your shirt." The remark, in context, takes on a sadly odd mock-reproachful avuncularity which its recipient parries with "Come on over and wipe it with your tongue." There is no return-of-line, gesturally or verbally, nor removal of dip. For a brief moment, elongated pockmarks I have not previously noticed stand sharply, starkly parallel at earlobe right of the famous Hedgecock epidermis.

Sad — to my eyes Roger seems sad. And I don't mean unhappy. (And not merely 'cause he is "losing") I mean sadly not-in-command-of-a-deadend-situation in your own goddam home, sadly shorn of a locally much-vaunted Partytime Cool, of all vestiges (in fact) of Manifest Preeminence. Since this is hardly *his* idea, and since

my “story” can certainly endure its discontinuation, why can’t he just tell us all to SCRAM? (Does he imagine, perchance, I haven’t already “seen through” EVERYTHING?) It’s like dinner-theatre of one of those whatsems: cruelty? pain? Painful to watch, painful to see — but also educational.

Yup, for as hurtin’ as such lessons well may be, amid us sits proof-in-flesh that everything is reducible to nothing, or to not-much, to a *real* not-much beyond any silly topical loss-of-preferred-status not-much. And this, by cracky, this Roger-as-improvised-lesson-plan, THIS is a Roger I not only “dig” but “respect” — unconditionally! — because he has gotten around (in how few short days?) to revealing, without premeditation, how WITHOUT INSULATION he in feet is. If you heat him he’ll melt, if you chill him he’ll freeze — how many superstars nowadays c’n do *that* number?

Few, I’m guessing, could do it so matter-of-factly. You never saw John Wayne, for inst, freeze or melt ‘til he showed up at an Oscar broadcast after leaving his guts in a “C”-ward trash compacter. Nixon — right? — you wouldn’t see melt if he took a shit in hell. And what the hell would he melt to?

In his ongoing distress, the subject of this piece appears less a deconstructed Ozymandias, or even a defrocked rock promoter, than (ultimately) just-a-bloke trapped in the losing hand of a humiliating small-g game;— we’ve all been there, and now, for at least the first time in his life, Roger Hedgecock (naked) has been there too. Louie Louie’s new clothes? Naw: a reg’lar joe in pale blue button-down ...

Two hours later it’s over. Or two and a half. By correctly answering my 15th or 16th Eric Carmen question I, uh, win. Roger comes in fifth out of five. What’s left of the beer is split up, and I get to take some obscurer brands home. Chip stains (but not dip stains) dot the cover of the household’s only Bukowski. I can’t help feeling I have been to this party (qua party) *many times before*.

OK, party’s over! As is this piece.

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Best Of

William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, John Clellon Holmes, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady, Herbert Huncke

What beat is. What beat is and isn't. Stuff like that.

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Dec. 15, 1994](#)



Illustration of Michael McClure, Philip Whalen, Diane DiPrima, Gary Snyder, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Ten, 12 years ago I was talking to some small-press jerk, a publisher of pamphlets and broadsides and occasional 40-page books and such, who didn't much care for the Beats. His idea of a Real Poet was somebody like James Merrill. Artaud to him was Not a poet, and Wallace Stevens was vastly preferable to Ezra Pound, who in turn was preferable to William Carlos Williams. His bottom line on Beats was they had nothing much to offer beyond the ambiguous (libertine) gushings and spoutings of any other Bohemian lit cult, and his only interest in 'em — historically— was that much of their early work saw its first light of print in venues much like his, though his own whimsical notion of publishing destiny was more on the order of being absorbed someday as an imprint of Knopf than spreading/thriving mushroom -like. City Lights-like, on its own enduring compost patch of back-catalogue populism.



William
Dunham 1953

John
Guthrie 1957

Jack
Korouac

Neil
Cassidy 1955

Gregory
Corbo 1950

Harold
Hufsch 1944

John
Clifton
Holmes

Anyway, were talking, and he's asking me, challenging me, to come up with one example of something (anything!): a single bookwrit perception by a Beat living or dead that a non-Beat of equivalent mettle would've found impossible — or at least difficult — to come by. So I think for a sec and I mention this scene late in *The Dharma Bums*, which I was reading at the time, where Jack Kerouac, backpack-weary on a strange dark street in Eisenhower frontlawn suburbia, flashes on how dogs bark at pedestrian footfalls but not hissing, squealing automobile tires — how maddening — and he, the jerk, says, "Okay, that's something." Gee, that was easy. (Where even I didn't think — and don't think — that was v. much in the way of an actual New Offering.)

Went to this party back in high school, few weeks after the '60 elections, an idiot teen "beatnik party," my first, though they'd been having such events for at least a couple years by then. Sweatshirts, berets, sunglasses. Drawn-on goatees. Rock Sc roll of the moment. No jazz. (No reefer.) Bongos notwithstanding, after an hour I was feeling kind of down, y'know?, 'cause it seemed to me even then that beatnik *meant something*, man, something more than a room full of bullshit, something on the order of, well — dig it — Kennedy. Or something.

This guy I know who makes low-budget horror films is always trying to make a case for Maynard G. Krebs as a beatnik, a *real* beatnik, to which I tell him: Maynard G. Krebs was a ROLE played on the *Dobie Gillis* show by Bob Denver, the basic thrust of which was I-hate-work/what-can-I-pretend-*this-week-is-totally-absurd-enough-to-call-groovy*. If you wanna go so far as to declare such shtick (qua shtick) beat, you might as well call the Fonz (even Springsteen) punk-rock. You can, but what's the payoff? Thin it out that much, why bother?

If you're gonna have parodies, I'd sooner accept insider parodies like Ed Sanders. Or second-raters who seem no deeper than Maynard, and maybe even *are*, but at least are so ingenuously, like Jack Micheline or Carl Solomon. And beats as hipsters: *what* hipsters? You could get by — and tell no lie — describing them all as a bunch of squares. Hip is but one of the myriad parameters of experience — vectors on being — beats embraced. Kerouac may get off on Lester Young in *On the Road*, but he also does a number on Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

Inclusive vs. exclusive: that *they*— the originals — were wildly inclusive re sources of input doesn't mean you should include (as fellow travelers) every heavy-outlined cartoon, every cardboard-mounted EXPLOITATION that came down the pike. Even "endearing" (and enduring) ones like Maynard.

Still, there's occasionally something not wholly unappealing about the cliché qua litrachoor. Which is to say (for inst) that Beatnik Poetry Contests can have their charm, are in any event not always thoroughly loathsome. Where a Pre-Raphaelite Poetry Contest (or Hemingway Parodython) would be inconceivable in any remotely similar context — among the real-time make-your-own-fun crowd, let's say — Beat is (perhaps) the most recognizable of literary affiliations, the most tip-of-tongue topical, the most (even if ironically/sarcastically) "enjoyable" qua text — groovable — and (within limits) *imitatable* — by a total outsider (literary neophyte) (functional illiterate). Which means what — beatnik art is "democratic"? "Double-open"? "Trans-cultural"? Don't ask me. I'm still fishing. In grocery-listing what Beat might possibly be "about," it would be too easy to push buttons that are ultimately Hippie, which I really can't see it as precursor of — *the* precursor of — nohow. I mean it is/isn't, but mostly — and most crucially — it is not, any more than Elvis, is the Grateful Dead — and I don't even mean in a "generational," decade-referenced "Zeitgeist" type of way. Hippie, if you wanna play such cards, was simultaneously the more and the less concrete Actual World version of certain prominent/ superficial (genuine/imagined) aspects of Beat Writ Large. Had more to do with rock and roll, and different drugs (differently *defined* drugs), anyway. In my dumb retrospect, it's more like the substance and tenor of Beat "skipped a generation." Beat seems much more like, has much more at heart to do with. Punk (hey: it wasn't hedonism, it wasn't flowers, it was more, y'know, *beat*). It's also arguable that those Beats who played a participatory tole in early Hippie (with the exception of Neal Cassady, who was just *digging it* — while fucking and chauffifering it — and Sanders, who was young enough to have his own band), e.g., Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Michael McClure, were simply SEDUCED by its paradise-now easy ride (not to mention the elder-statesman preeminence it for ten minutes afforded them — before casting them in the over-30 geezer slag heap with everybody else), but this seduction had no more basis in Universal Oompah than kids voting for McGovern over Nixon (f'rinstance), like why the hell not?

Reading Beat literature calms (soothes) me the way Buddhism — or let's say Buddhist literature — or even Walt Whitman — can't (or doesn't). Or maybe I don't let it, but I let Beat. Soothes me the way watching the rain can. Or a cat washing himself.

Okay — first stab — what separates the beats from other "writing scenes" is its undivided insistence: Let's get naked (for five minutes) and tell the truth (let's at least *try*, okay?)...and this at a Time, a Place, when/where, said Ginsberg, "the suppression of contemplative humanity [was] nearly complete." Which is not even to say, hmm, Let's get honest — if we're really naked, the truth'll just fucking ooze out, can't help but ooze out: writing as emanation of a writer's bucknaked soul

(speaking by turns loud/soft/thudding/ purring/silent), not even an art-on-a-pedestal “transcription” of suchstuff: real lifebloody real mammal sweat, real sweet-dream vapor.

(Which eliminates John Updike.)

The roster. Since there *is* no such thing as Beat Style — it’s a wild pluralism that escapes simple taxonomy — Kerouac made books on the forge of first-draft automatic writing; William Burroughs purloined (and cut up) pre-existent texts; Snyder was influenced by haikus and Robinson Jeffers; Philip Whalen has acknowledged his debt to Gertrude Stein, of all people — Beat Writing is best approached as no more, no less than writing by any and all Beats. To qualify as a Beat, for this piece anyway, it’s enough to be a friend (at the very least: friend of a friend) of a Beat, specifically of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs...some finite interpersonal extension of one or more of these three. Don’t mean to sound fatuous, or again beg the question, but friendship, and the (lingering, intertwining) friendships between/among the writers involved, are the very content — the meat — of much of their poetry and prose; all the references and homages to each other, down even to the merest namedrop, seem more heartfelt (and necessary) than traditional writerly protocol would require; their literary interplay (the crossfeeding, the trial-and-error, the shared open lab environment) is vital and immense; the projected (still ongoing) sense of “literary community” is perhaps more authentic (for its size) than any there has ever otherwise been.

But of course (thankgod) it’s a 360-degree deal: love, hate, and indifference make the whole thing (for want of a better expression) existentially real to the shorthairs. Looking for a little betrayal? Check out five pages from the end of *On the Road*, where Dean Moriarty (Neal) leaves Sal Paradise (Jack) fevered and delirious in Mexico City...and five pages later Jack toasts him as a grand wink of the planetary Night.

If for no other reason than that he was basically a loner (though you could certainly come up with plenty of others), Charles Bukowski was *not* Beat: no!

Apropos of nothing (and everything), in multifarious non-frivolous ways, Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs are to Beat what Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk were to Bebop. Parker and Kerouac: universe-blazers, stripminers of personal pneuma, and easily the finest (most consistently exciting) soloists. Ginsberg/Gillespie: the behavioral flamboyance, the scene-manifesting definition-starts-here show-and-tell, scene-steering sometimes to the point of trivialization, of bric-a-brac horseshit on dotted lines as hokey as any their respective scenes

were born to kill — but still, much work of seminal muscle and technical brilliance. Burroughs and Monk: the odd men out, stylistically and attitudinally different enough to be “not really beat,” “not really bop” (just majorly, transcendently significant and “of the time”), reassessors, dynamiters of prevailing form (and challengers of audience forbearance).

Okay, some beat books I’ve read...The standard line on Kerouac, a line, common enough, is *On the Road* is his masterpiece while its mandated sequel, *Dharma Bums*, is simply not in its class. I see it a little different. *On the Road*, good as it is, is far from Jack’s high water mark, no better than his fifth or sixth best, and *Bums* isn’t far behind. There are even days when I’ll reverse the pecking order. It’s mainly a question of whether you wanna read about Neal (Cody Pomeray) or Snyder (Japhy Ryder), or about the late ’40s Jack as opposed to the mid-’50s installment. The prose in *Bums* is maybe a little more bite-size, less willfully rambling and nutty, but the basic fictional premise — the film of my life, take it or leave it — is identical.

His actual bloody masterpiece, and one of the great, great works of the English language, is *Big Sur*. The great first-person now-I-begin-to-die novel, it documents a few weeks of horror as Jack was pushing 40 at Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s cabin overlooking the Pacific, where LF had convinced him he could dry out (he’d been drinking heavily for years) and write nature poems and whatnot and never have to drink again. He does nature and poems for a couple weeks, hitches back (or tries to — a failure so traumatic he would never hitch again) to San Francisco, meets and greets old faces, new faces, and puts a down payment on his terminal drunk. In the course of things, he yells “Fuck you” at a Michael McClure only asking for (as promised) the address of Jack’s editor, has his last civil encounter with Neal, during which he is “given” the last in a long string of women Neal would for various reasons dump on him (he falls for her, unfalls for her, then tries to stir up trouble between her and Mrs. Neal, his own erstwhile slumbermate Carolyn), wakes up drunk in a park with the saintly Philip Whalen watching over him (last documented instance of a saint doing such for him), steps all over the generosity of Lew Welch and Lenore Kandel — friendships stretched to their limit — *snap* — as much an explanation for why he then/there began to *officially* pack it in as any. Finally, sick from all the cheap swill he’s been drinking, he returns to the cabin for the third or fourth time, d.t.’s rampant, to hallucinate Neal’s woman’s kid as the (literal) devil — after which he sucked it up, —went home to mom and sat down and wrote it, raking himself over coals even he (the self-loathe champ) had never dreamed of, and seven years later he was dead (so it took awhile).

A notch down is *The Subterraneans*. Written in three days on speed in the fall of ’53, it’s as good as it gets for a three-day novel — or a lost-love-tearing-my-guts-out

novel of any gestation. Of all the early to mid film-of-my-life works ("The Duluoz Legend"), as hot a read as most of it tends to be, only *The Subterraneans* stands out as an *ur*-expression of topical etcetera — the tale/told as Screaming Literature — and it isn't really until *Big Sur* ('61) and *Vanity of Duluoz* ('67) that he manages to come up with a Different Kinds of Statement, a breakaway then another to the Other Side of Writing, a pair of fully focused New Ways of telling tales at all — above and beyond the fact of write-ing them — and this at a time when the overall level of his writing—qua writing — was at its peak, its zenith, never better, never stronger — am I lost yet? — talking 'bout the life and times of *The Subterraneans*...or some such. Anyway: the story of Jack and Mardou — a black woman, played in the film version by Leslie Caron (!) — who eventually fucks Gregory Corso (not in film). George Peppard played Jack, everybody lives hap ever aft at film's end — and real-life Jack had yet another alibi for drinking till his esophagus hemorrhaged.

Vanity of Duluoz is the sleeper, last one to come out while he was still alive, some bios even label it lousy, or pass over it as the feeble output of a dying man, but it's one of his very best. In form, it's kind of I've-got-this-to-say-and-that-to-say (listen good or walk out — but you'll miss some *surprises*) — a cross between Ring Lardner and Thucydides? No more Buddhist humility (and a few quarts down from his normal quota of "compassion"), it's a take-off-the-gloves affair, not too kind to Ginsberg (or even Burroughs for that matter). Covers a lot of autobio space/time not touched on elsewhere, for ex., Jack, football star (with rude comments 'bout his college coach, Lou Little); his buddy Lutien Carr's stabbing of Dave Kammerer.

A couple of shorties, *Tristessa* and *Visions of Gerard*, 100 and 150 pages, respectively, also deserve wider recognition. The former, consisting of two time-separated takes on the march to the Abyss of a heroin-addicted Mexican prostitute, is possibly his best single-subject hunk of prose writing. The latter, a meditation on the death of his older brother from rheumatic fever (Jack was four at the time), presents the author in a windy world of pain and incomprehensible grownup protocols, and contains probably his longest third-person run, a multi-page fantasy about his father and his poker buddies.

Pull My Daisy is the script from the film of the same name — Jack's voice-over, improvised in two sessions while he watched the visuals — camera follows a roach to a piece of cheese, it's a "cheese roach."

Maggie Cassidy, story of a high school romance, goes on and on, a not-unbearable melodrama — 'bout him not getting laid — until the last two chapters, which end it like a Faulkner (years pass, home from the wars, he tries to get off her panty girdle — change of narrative voice— no go): not bad. Also: we learn that he did in fact drive

alone (or says he did) (only evidence in any of the books), working nights at a garage in hometown Lowell, Mass.

Lonesome Traveler is a collection of odds and ends with a travel tie-in, many of which had been published in *Holiday* and *Escapade* and whatnot, and most of which could've been recycled into early to mid novels, as inserts or whatever, but weren't (or cover turf previously covered anyway). "The Railroad Earth" and "Piers of the Homeless Night" are pretty good. In "New York Scenes" he mentions Robert De Niro's artist father.

Even *Dr. Sax* and *Pic* ain't half bad if you read 'em with Jack's reading voice in mind, for which the Rhino three-CD set. *The Jack Kerouac Collection*, is (in spite of its glitzy gosh-oh-gee booklet) invaluable. *Sax*, the only one of his novels written entirely (or close) on marijuana, doesn't really make it as, in Jack's words, "the third part of *Faust*," or even as much of a childhood-is-so-scary roman a reefer, but it has its moments. The much-maligned *Pic*, a 20-year-old manuscript dusted off and fussed with (minimally) towards the end, though not soon enough to be issued before he was dead, doesn't play at all if you read it as an African-American dialect joke—natch — but if you read it as *Jack* reading the joke...hey, there's some real warmth and tenderness there (believe it).

Then there are the clunkers. Only thing worth a damn about *Book of Dreams*, the sole Kerouac published by City Lights during Jack's lifetime (they passed on *On the Road*), is the cover shot of Jack sleeping...tells you something about Ferlinghetti's taste. *Mexico City Blues*, consisting of "242 choruses" — y'know, jazz — has a couple-few good things, or let's call 'em *interesting*, in most cases they're about death (24, 57, 184), but mainly it's just page after page of lesser (much lesser) "beat poetry" — his best poetry (and he was the best Poet of the whole dang bunch) is in his prose. *In Satori in Paris*, about an aborted '60s trip to find his family's trail in dusty French archives (mostly he gets drunk and decides to chuck it), he isn't sure himself that anything especially eye-opening (satori: "kick in the eye") actually happened. *Desolation Angels*, which covers the period from the end or so of *Dharma Bums* to the release of *On the Road*, should've been a good'un but it's really the shits. At one point, en route to California with his mother (Memere) — the light of his life, bane of his being, and only woman he ever took on the road — he comments that if you can't dig it, "tell it to Mao." Even guest appearances by Lafcadio Orlovsky — Peter's brother — and Alan Watts don't ultimately redeem things.

Call me a heretic, call *my* mom a whore, but I find *Visions of Cody*, his "nonlinear" Cassady book, largely unreadable, and not just because every edition I've seen has had a miniscule typeface. Opening with a shitload of viable, but increasingly

monotonous, unconnected “sketches” (lonely ladies in the rain...a pork chop in Hartford '41...following Lee Konitz into a music store), it slowly but surely reveals itself as a top-heavy (bottom-heavy) (all-heavy) 400 pages without much payoff — *Moby Dick* without an Ahab to take everybody to hell. Even Jack's voice, his and Neal's combined, can't save it, and what Ginsberg, McClure et al. rave about is (I'm guessing) what they'd like to IMAGINE it is (it isn't!)...the kitchen sink, ma! (has lots o' leaks). Verbatim transcripts of actual taped conversations between Neal and Jack — or alternating monologues — only serve to underscore the difference (and distance) between verbatim spoken and verbatim written. Jack's stream of vocal consciousness was less interesting than his unedited stream of writerly etc. (or: his ear for *recollected* speech beats the hand as originally dealt), and Neal's vocals here are less hot, less “on,” than the voice in his letters. Some of the black stuff even seems racist this time (racist as a non-ironic *I'm-pure-so-I-can-use-the-word- nier*, racist as this-is-America-and-I-can-say-what-I-want provocation). Occasional patches of good content, tho: Neal's report on Burroughs in Texas; Jack talking 'bout meeting Lucien and Kammerer and Burroughs, getting blown by his first wife, quitting football 'cause he heard Beethoven's Fifth one day just as it was time for practice.

Soon after Jack died, City Lights put out *Scattered Poems*—no great shakes. A little later, *Heaven & Other Poems* came out on Grey Fox — ditto.

Since his third (and final) wife kicked it, some more substantial new stuff has appeared. *Pomes All Sizes*, titled and intended for publication during his lifetime has more variety (and less self-consciousness) than *Mexico City Blues*, but still the best stuff is about death: “if I die the dying's over — if I live the dying's just begun.” Its first printing by City Lights didn't have his name on the binding, the final revenge (one surmises) of Ferlinghetti for Jack's having once called him a “genial businessman.” *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, a series of sutras encouraged by Snyder at the time of the action covered in *Dharma Bums*, is a better version of the Buddhist folderol in the opening section of *Desolation Angels*—less annoying, jus' plain better. *Old Angel Midnight*, originally in *Big Table* mag, is the most entertaining of Jack's attempts at a *Finnegans Wake* sort of “goofy language” spew. Good Blonde & Others is the best (so far) of the odds 'n' ends collections. Title piece (from *Playboy*) is real good, “In the Ring” is a neat little whatsit on his father as wrestling promoter, and “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” and “Belief & Technique for Modern Prose” — classics long out of print in any form — are always nice to have around. And there's this other one from 1990, one of those little ones from Hanuman Books, a bunch of fragments of interviews and stuff — if you missed it you'll live — *Safe in Heaven Dead*.

Sponsored

(Oh, I've never read *The Town and the City*, his "pre-Beat," traditionally linear, Thomas Wolfean novel. Tried, but I've never gotten very far. Third-person, kind of dreary, with Jack's persona split among a bunch of brothers.)

The first full-fledged biography, *Kerouac* by Ann Charters (1973), contains an error conspicuous and major enough to make you doubt the veracity of the rest — the claim that Jack's sister Nin killed herself. Turns out she died of a heart attack (corrected in later editions) — now how the hell'd she get *that* wrong?

Of the subsequent bios/memoirs, the standouts are *Memory Babe*, by Gerald Nicosia, and *Jack's Book*, by Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee. The former, over 700 pages, has a lot of data not in any of the rest (details of 20 years' worth of fall-down drunks, including one with painter Willem de Kooning; the numerous times he had sex with men, especially after he decided his dick was too small; a bad acid trip in Florida as late as '69; phone calls to first wife Edie towards the end, allegedly asking her to get back with him; partial transcript of a tape made drunk with the radio playing, also towards the end, Jack singing along, improvising dirty lyrics, funnier and more revealing than any of the tapes in *Visions of Cody*) and more textual critique of Jack's books than the others put together. *Jack's Book* consists of the oral reminiscences of anybody living ('78) who'd had anything to do with Jack and was still willing to talk about it, which is more people than were willing to talk to Robt. Reisner while he was compiling *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*. The participants, quoted in bits ranging from a paragraph to several pages at a clip, are fascinating as much for their own strut as for whatever light they shed on, y'know, Jack. Highlights include: Neal's first wife LuAnne on who was fucking who which week; Lenore Kandel on the external look and feel of Jack's last crazy night at Big Sur; Gore Vidal claiming Ginsberg once told him that Mémère had told *him* she suspected her husband, Jack's father, was a "pansy" — something Allen himself denied ever hearing/telling.

Dennis McNally's *Desolate Angel* contains a lot of material quoted or footnoted in the better-written (if shorter) Tom Clark bio, *Jack Kerouac*; he's also got the most of anybody on Jack's relationship with Dody Muller, like how Mémère wouldn't let her wash a dish without rewashing it herself, and once called her a "witch" for playing with candle wax. On Lucien's girlfriend Celine Young, he has Jack "make out" with her (while Lucien is in jail and Jack is still married to Edie); Clark scoops him, if you wanna believe this stuff, by having Jack fuck her. Clark's also got a great ending, maybe even the most appropriate of any of'em: for a guy so obsessed with death, so hungry for being done with life, Jack sure didn't seem to enjoy his own dying (certainly not like, say, Jim Morrison).

While some people I know consider *Minor Characters*, by Jack's one-time gal Joyce Johnson (nee Classman), a sour-grapes insider-becomes-outsider book, I see it as a pretty dispassionate examination of Jack, the beats and how they treated women (like shit). It's also got the best theory yet on the origin of the Jack-Mémère *relationship* (Mémère taking him into her bed— clinging to him — following the death of Gerard), an analysis of Jack's weltzschermerz as not-too-subliminal mom-hate, and some of the most detailed depictions of his continuing (late '50s) friendship with Lucien.

Oddest Jack book is probably *Visions of Kerouac*, an inadvertent piece of kitsch by Charles Jarvis, ostensibly an account of our boy's final stand in Lowell. A dazzlingly obtuse professor (or something) at the U. of Lowell, Jarvis drank with him in this town, which a decade after the publication of *On the Road* didn't even know him, constantly asking stupid questions for which Jack always had a drunken answer. A poignant scene: returning to Lowell H.S., sight of old football glories, where nobody even remembers him for *that*. Very scary photos of an unkempt red-faced Scowling Jack in rooms full of suited smiling cardboard locals.

Worst of the lot is *Quest for Kerouac*, by a glib Brit named Chris Challis — basically just a groupie-grope for Jack and other living/dead celebrities, for ongoing manifestations of their celebrated aura, not even much of a celebration of their Being. Barry Gifford's *Kerouac's Town* takes on the same chore — visiting the haunts — with a good deal more affection and dignity. Actually visits — is allowed in the house — by widow Stella (while Mémère is still alive — another room — he don't get to see her), who complains about the Charters bio, tries to refute the story of Mémère slamming the door in Ginsberg's face (she only refused to let him in, then called the cops as he sat outside in the car).

Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's *Jack Kerouac: A Chicken-Essay*, possibly the earliest book-length treatise solely on Jack (1972), has its share of insights (*On the Road* as the first certification of San Francisco as geo-center of coming revolution; *Big Sur* and Jack's ID. as French-Canadian, not — for once — Franco-American; Kerouac as the politico-revolutionary equal of Ginsberg and Burroughs). Jack spoke nothing but French until he was six, by the way, and somebody makes a case — I think it's Clark but I can't find the reference — that just as it was for Joseph Conrad, English was Jack's *second* language, therefore... whatever.

King of the Beatniks, a play by Arthur Knight in which Jack and Neal hang out one more time, 11 years after Neal's death, 9 after Jack's, and which repeats the canard of Jack's sister killing herself (published 12 years after the corrected Charters text), is absolute dog food.

In *Kerouac West Coast*, John Montgomery, who'd been one of Jack and Snyder's mountain-climb partners in *Dharma Bums*, also repeats the canard, but only two years after.

Although Ginsberg's total page count as a published poet is probably less than the total for a couple-three Kerouacs — heck, the bulk of his poems can be found in three currently available books, *Collected Poems 1947-1980*; *White Shroud*, and *Cosmopolitan Greetings* — I've probably only read about half of'em — who except students reads entire books of poems?

The stuff that's great is great ("Howl," "Kaddish," "A Supermarket in California," "Death to Van Gogh's Ear," "Wichita Vortex Sutra," "Please Master," "On Neruda's Death," "White Shroud," "First Party at Ken Kesey's with Hell's Angels," "Don't Grow Old," etc., etc.), appearances by Jack, Neal, Bill, and the rest of the gang are always fun ("Two Sonnets After Reading Kerouac's Manuscript *The Town and the City*," "On Neal's Ashes," "On Burroughs's Work," "Gregory Corso's Story," "G.S. [Gary Snyder] Reading Poesy at Princeton"), and the rest of it, at least starting from the time of "Howl" (1955), I certainly *could* read if you gave me a couple months (which is something I could never do with James Merrill) — I mean he changed the face of poetry-as-dealt as decisively as anybody ever has — right? — but I still have to say even the great stuff is sometimes a little...um...clunky. For images he's ace, metaphor mountains, tops, his momentum module, ditto— forward, go — poetry as the conscience of man up the old wazoo, self-consciousness as NO SIN (now and forever), but when you read (in *Composed on the Tongue*, for inst) this biz about how "Howl" was modeled rhythmically on "Lester Leaps In" (Lester Young) you gotta wonder what kind of ear he has: duh duh *dah* dah, *dah* duh-da dah duh DAH dah — now where in "Howl" is that? (He doesn't have Jack's ear.) Perhaps I quibble.

Anyway, he's 68 now, and his recent publishings are still, well, satisfying. In new ways, cumulative ways, *final* ways, even. "Improvisation in Beijing" (a once and for all why-I-fucking-write- motherfucker), "May Days 1988" (after all these years, claiming death — at last — for himself), "Sphincter" (the decline and fall of his physical asshole), "Salutations to Fernando Pessoa" (anti-humble? pseudo-anti-humble? pseudo-pseudo-anti-humble? *The Vanity of Ginsberg?*): good'uns.

And then there's that coffee table beast: *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript & Variant Versions, Fully Annotated by Author, with Contemporaneous Correspondence, Account of First Public Reading, Legal Skirmishes, Precursor Texts & Bibliography*—actual title, not subtitle. Umpteen tons of archival impressiveness, singlespaced and double-spaced typescripts, Allen leading you through time-coded crawlpaths of creation, a selection of verse he feels like designating the

Roots (Christopher Smart, Shelley, Apollinaire, Mayakovsky, Kurt Schwitters, Artaud, Lorca, Wm. Carlos Wms., Hart Crane), a complete "Howl" bibliography (24 languages), an interesting (all-too-typical) all-but-nothing '86 statement by Carl Solomon (full original title: "Howl for Carl Solomon") plus *his* complete bibliography (two books), nice paper, nice photos — but's

all a little precious, *n'est-ce pas*? Cover price, \$22.50 — original price on City Lights was like what, less than a buck? As Jake LaMotta says of an overcooked steak in *Raging Bull*, an endeavor like this kinda defeats its own purpose. (The purpose of "Howl"!!) (Did he say *porpoise*?)

In any event, since there are so many available formats of bookbound Ginsberg text, it might be more useful — enjoyable — whatever — to read around...start with the poems, natch, but then move on to the interviews, notebooks, letters, lecture transcripts, captioned photos — back & around.

In *Composed on the Tongue* he talks about such arcana as Kerouac's brief ('40-'41) flirtation with Marxist — who'd've thunk it? — and Burroughs's mockout of the '48 election campaign. *Straight Heart's Delight* has a series of (typed in progress, typos and misspellings left alone) "sex experiments" involving Allen and Peter Orlovsky ("I continue jerking him off, his cock has a slight bend"). In *Gay Sunshine Interview* he discusses the "Matterhorns of cock, Grand Canyons of asshole" line from "Kaddish." *Allen Verbatim* contains the presentation of his research to the Institute for Policy Studies on the CIA's involvement in the heroin trade (1971 — before too many people were onto that one); his response, on a live college radio show, upon hearing of the death of Ezra Pound. *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* has a long section of him recalling (for author Paul Portugues) the specific drugs he took during the writing of such and such major poems (lot more morphine than might be assumed) (also, he was real spooked by acid — felt obligated to keep taking it for the higher sake of Evolving Consciousness); in the section-on Tibetan Buddhism, he advances an argument re Hubert Humphrey and Vietnam that sounds incredible coming from anyone but a card-carrying Democrat (hindsight and aging can do that). In *The Visions of the Great Rememberer*, restored to its full length as preface to the most recent edition of *Visions of Cody*, he wonders whether Kerouac was right when he accused Allen of stealing from him — verse — and decides yes, all these years later, .. Jack was right after all. As Ever is the collected correspondence of Allen and Cassady—amazing how much of this stuff was preserved (towards the end Neal is incoherent, but in the early days he more than holds his own). *Journals Early Fifties Early Sixties* lists all the books he read (or intended to read) in January, June, and July of '54 (inch *Winesburg, Ohio* and selections by Kant). *Indian Journals* has gruesome beggar photos. *Photographs* has the full Burroughs-Kerouac

couch shot cropped for the cover of Viking's Beat Reader; one of Neal and Natalie Jackson under a hyping pushing *The Wild One*; a two-page spread of the life-beaten Orlovsky clan; and a very scary pic of Jack in '64 "shuddering in mortal horror, grimacing on D.M.T." (giving it to his dear buddy at that point — the half-hour concentrated version of LSD — had to be the meanest thing Allen ever did) (or did and documented).

There are two recent Ginsberg bios, *Ginsberg*, by Barry Miles and *Dharma Lion* by Michael Schumacher, and sort of a third from the late '60s, *Allen Ginsberg in America* by Jane Kramer, each okay for what it does best (the detailing of

an innaresting bloke's life), but all suffer from the same problem — they eat his "image" whole, take his role as America's Sartre (or something) as a fait accompli, and deal with him at too many stages of things as an undebunkable sacred cow. This is most bothersome when it comes to the Psychedelic Sixties. The assertion in all three, for example, that their subject was a beacon in the night for spiritually starving contempo youth, that he indeed served as an actual — not metaphoric, not imagined — leader, y'know, "guru," for masses of folks under 25 or 27 or 29, is just flat-out absurd — like the kind of dumb take on things you might get from TV news. To wit: they picture him prodding/coaxing numerous groups, from Be-In dopers to Hell's Angels, into joining him in assorted Eastern chants —wholeheartedly — from Hare Krishna to just plain Om.

As demographics go, I could be counted as a member of that age & culture group, and lemme tell ya we wasn't starving nohow. Maybe Prague kids were in '65, but us 'Merican young'uns had enough Culture/Nurture of our own by '66-'67 (y'know: rock and roll — its healthiest period ever), thanx. To even the more hip and booklearnéd among us, Allen was at most a reborn curiosity, as in "Hey, looks like Ginsberg's shuffled himself back in," and that largely because he seemed to covet the limelight, couldn't long endure without it — seemed as forced an act as Tiny Tim, y'know? Even on a drug level — that he'd "been there" first — such hokum gave him no more cachet than it would've Huxley (had he not been three years dead). A couple things to bear in mind about young louts and their preferences through the late '60s: (1) there really wasn't all that much (maybe 6-7 percent) Eastern flavoring in the overall mix, honest, and the very notion of "guru" was almost instant self-parody, and (2) when anybody on stage at rock shows — celebrity or not — would try during a break to get a chant going, maybe a couple people would comply out of embarrassment, it happened, but *many* people would yell out, "Fuck you!"

(And now that I think of it, no: in spite of his “Punk Rock Your My Big Crybaby” poem, in spite of his record with the Clash, Ginsberg was *not* a beat who translated well into Punk.)

The biographers also fail to mention what an amazing NERD the young Allen was. Fail, that is, to underline it (‘cause it’s certainly there). The biggest nerd ever to emerge as a major writer (which is COOL — don’t get me wrong)? One would think.

Howl of the Censor is the story of the San Francisco obscenity trial City Lights was put through for publishing and selling *Howl and Other Poems*. The complete trial transcript is not a bad read; the two bozos called as witnesses for the prosecution are good for a giggle.

Allen’s CD of “accompanied” readings produced by Hal Wilner, *The Lion for Real*, and Philip Glass’s operatic demolition of “Wichita Vortex Sutra” on *Hydrogen Jukebox* I wouldn’t wish on a doberman. There’s supposed to be a four-CD box of vintage readings and such out on Rhino — I haven’t heard it.

In terms of the “evolution of the novel” (y’know: *that* old warhorse), William Seward Burroughs is probably the most important figure since the heyday of Faulkner — certainly more than Kerouac (even if not “as good a writer”), who was more about the genesis of personal (old-fashioned) art. We’re talking “form” here, not “storytelling” — as a storyteller Bill’s voice is probably more old-fashioned than Jack’s. Anyway, historically more vital, more *necessary*, than Kerouac, but he doesn’t have a single work as start-to-finish words-on-a-page exemplary as, say, *Big Sur* or *The Subterraneans*—his import (again, even more than that of Kerouac, who thought about his long haul well in advance) is in his whole entire oeuvre: the whole mess (and it often is one).

For the sake of not-so-dumb analogy, just as Faulkner can be seen as the full extension/realization of some weighty implications of the mystery pulp (units of fictive text, from the sentence on up, as THEMSELVES existing in a state of mystery: a *universal* who said what, what did *that* mean, what the suffering hell is going on???), Burroughs is the extension (and “art” appropriation) of science fiction, specifically a dystopian sci-fi whose universe is one of menace, terror, and Control—viral, genetic, corporate, and otherwise. Operating from various “possible” — imaginable— space/time coordinates at which the conventions and rites of sequential, linear fiction have little or no sway, he has managed, from *Naked Lunch* on, to not just nibble at nonlinear, but to BE it. Before or after, what’s the difference? First person versus third? No functional, no *useful* distinction (so deploy them in the same paragraph). Dialogue vs. voice-neutral narrative: ditto. An

aesthetic that shuns repetition? Repeat ad infinitum. All art, all language, representing Control, the Mission is to come up with a technology of de-control, to debunk the notion of the unitary “artist” (and his goddamn Mission). Voila: the cutup and fold-in (by which anyone can make or unmake literature, turn it into a document found in a bottle on Venus); the establishment of safe zones for “bad writing” (intentional, unintentional, readymade, synthetic, etc.: anything goes and it *doesn't have to play...at all!*).

The individual novels, because there's so much overlap (both style and content), are hard to separately rate or even separate...better to just chronologically group them. First you've got *Junky* (a.k.a. *Junkie*) and *Queer*, from the early '50s — the linear novels. No cutups yet; “routines” run not as bald narratives but as framed realtime verbal performances by Burroughs's stand-in character. *Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket That Exploded*, and *Nova Express*, from '59 to '64, constitute the first big serving of Black Meat (the '66 revision of *Soft Machine* being my own favorite — densest with cutups — or maybe I remember wrong). *The Wild Boys* (great chapter: “The Frisco Kid” — material introduced, cut, shuffled, mixed, matched until he gets it right), *Exterminator!* (nice poem on p. 13: “Come and jack off... 1929”), and *Port of Saints*, '71 to '73, are more of same with some new faces and stylistic mixes. *Cities of the Red Night* (my favorite Burroughs of all—his longest—almost Dickensian in spots), *The Place of Dead Roads* (my vote for his worst—takes about 100 pages to get going— the most linear of the late ones), and *The Western Lands* (more anti-monotheistic than Ishmael Reed, with a very heavy ending: writer tries to write his way out of death, fails — if *Big Sur* is the great now-I-begin-to-die book, *Western Lands* is Burroughs's now-I-am-dead book, with the entropy and detritus of his life as a writer: recycled lesser cutups; fewer new cutups — writing is something you do from *within life*, not apart from it — you get old, they're too much present-tense bother), '81 to '87, are maybe the end of his novelistic road. (A road the EQUAL of Faulkner's, or Beckett's, after all is said and done.)

In addition to the above, there's *The Yage Letters*, an “epistolary novel” (with some ten pages of participation by Ginsberg), the first part of which (“In Search of Yage”) dates from the time of *Queer*; and *Interzone*, a bookworth of very funny scraps (oh, did I forget to mention he's funnier than *any* of your standard stand-up humorists — Twain, Lardner, Nabokov, etc.?) from the time *Naked Lunch* was being pieced together. *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, a collaborative novel co-writ with Kerouac somewhere in the '40s, is supposed to still exist but has never been published.

Then come his shorties: *Roosevelt After Inauguration* (on abuses of political power; 79 edition has a section on Anita Bryant, Sen. Briggs and Proposition 6 —

remember?), *White Subway* (works in progress, stillborn works, “experimental” leavings), *Cobble Stone Gardens* (the stink of childhood St. Louis remembered), *The Last Words of Dutch Schultz* (delirium as natural generatrix of nonlinearity), *The Book of Breeething* (on Egyptian hieroglyphics and the Tut tomb death curse—illustrated), *Blade Runner, a Movie* (from which the movie title was lifted, otherwise no resemblance), *The Retreat Diaries* (dream notes and such from two weeks without a typewriter on a Buddhist retreat not totally his idea — far superior to Kerouac’s *Book of Dreams*), *Early Routines* (inch the time he cut off the end of his finger), *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (speech delivered to an Outer Space conference ’88: dreams not spaceships for exploring the sucker), *Tornado Alley* (“For John Dillinger — In hope he is still alive”), *Painting & Guns* (his own work in the former, recommendations on the latter), *The Cat Inside* (one of his finest efforts—believe it—best of all cat books — cats as The Other — declares his current mission their protection).

The Adding Machine — his grandfather invented it (true) — is an organized collection of essays/lectures, chock full of surprises (e.g., he loves the work of Scott Fitzgerald, hates Beckett). In “On Jack Kerouac,” he credits Jack with not only naming *Naked Lunch* (he also named “Howl,” by the by) but getting him to write at all. “Bugger the Queen” (same time frame as the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen”) is an anti-monarchist delight.

The Job is a series of early-’70s interviews of Bill by Daniel Odier (“And what of money, ownership, property”?) with illustrative experiments and routines. *The Third Mind*, with Brion Gysin, actual father of the cutup, is an exegesis on such methods, but (disappointingly) not a textbook, not exactly much of a read. Victor Bockris’s *With William Burroughs: A Report from the Bunker*, which feels (ho hum) like a Burroughs issue of Interview, features pix with Patti Smith and Christopher Isherwood, texts of dinners with Susan Sontag (more venom on Beckett) and Debby Harry, drinks with Terry Southern.

William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception, 1959–1989 (ed. by Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg) collects 30 years’ worth of reviews good/bad (none indifferent). Of special interest are those by John Ciardi (who too earnestly—and one-dimensionally—compares *Naked Lunch* to Swift and Dante, missing all of its humor), Mary McCarthy (*Naked Lunch* as the prototypical “stateless novel”), and Marshall McLuhan (who, at probably his least global-village benign, understands Burroughs better than he did TV: heroin as a means of making the body into “an environment that includes the universe”).

The Burroughs File contains “Burroughs in Tangier” by Paul Bowles and Alan Ansen’s “Whoever Can Pick Up a Frying Pan Owns Death,” an early (insider) summary of Bill’s life in letters and out, more in context here than in *At the Front* (it’s the second piece in both).

The Letters of William S. Burroughs, 1945–1959 (ed. Oliver Harris) is a fantastically great 430 pages, spilling such shit as Bill’s will to become a writer (far earlier/stronger than generally presumed), his thoughts on cheap farm labor, his high level of paranoia as the publication of *Naked Lunch* approached, his indecision on how to market it (pro-heroin? anti? — back and forth). Most fascinating of all, perhaps, is a letter to Ginsberg following the latter’s announcement of intent to be reprogrammed as a heterosexual. Bill tells him he’s been “laying women for the past 15 years...better than nothing, like a tortilla is better than no food...but no matter how many tortillas...I still want a steak,” to which his wife Joan (four months before he would shoot her) has added in pencil, “About the 20th of the month, things get a bit tight and he lives on tortillas” (touché!). Hepcat parody on p. 121: “Get with those technicolor peyote kicks Daddy O and shoot me that solid address.”

Of the complete bios, *Literary Outlaw* by Ted Morgan (who’d previously biographed FDR and Churchill) is more than adequate; *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible* by Ginsberg biographer Barry Miles, less. Interesting fact, only the first half of which is in the Miles book: Bill Was married to somebody else before Joan (to help her, a Euro-Jew, escape the Nazis), and at about the same time his uncle, Ivy Lee, was Hitler’s U.S. publicist (before which he’d given the Rockefellers a gameplan: shoot strikers if you must, but go down and get photographed shaking hands with the ones you don’t shoot).

On his CDs for Hal Wilner, *Dead City Radio* and *Spare Ass Annie and Other Tales*, Bill fares much better than did Ginsberg. The first has a reading of the Sermon on the Mount from the belly of the Beast, the heart of Control; on the second he directly (and tenderly) addresses one of his cats. Better is *The Elvis of Letters*, with Gus Van Sant. Best of all, *Break Through in Grey Room* (vintage sound pieces from the ‘60s/’70s, with Gysin, Ian Sommerville, and others).

Paper Cloud/Thick Pages is 33 pages (plus cover) of paintings — full color — about five of them slightly interesting, two of these because the paint is over pages from the “Waghadas” section of *Cities of the Red Night*.

Which is where I lobby for turning this into a two-part piece — it certainly has gone on a bit. Woe to me for ever thinking I could handle this briefly, and there’s still maybe 20–25 more to go. Beatniks.

"Hello, mr. editor...two?" No? Okay, I'll have to condense, compress the rest, let me just swallow the cotton from a Benzedrex inhaler and try my best....

Cassady, Neal. Kerouac's buddy and early muse; jester, asshole, conman for the ages. The first third of his only book, *The First Third*, is pretty damn good, the rest good enough. Only in his letters, tho, do you get that here/there/everywhere fevered discontinuity that became one of the staples of Jack's "post-Wolfean" modus operandi. For bulk letters there's *As Ever* (him to Ginsberg), *Letters from Prison* (mostly to Carolyn, who refused to put up the house to raise bail money) and some things to Jack in the *Beat Reader* (ed. Ann Charters).

The only Neal bio, *The Holy Goof* by William Plummer, is no big deal, very little if anything (pre-Ken Kesey) you don't already know from basic beat sources. A short roman à clef by Kesey, "The Day After Superman Died" (in *Demon Box*) doesn't go much deeper (and moves the date of his death off by a year, to the weekend of Woodstock — ouch). A Kesey mostly picture book, *The Further Inquiry*, transcribes some Neal monologues and has a flip-page sequence of Neal, shirtless, in '60s motion. In *On the Bus*, Jerry Garcia has some nice things to say about Neal's role in his, Jerry's, decision to go with music (over commercial art). Charles Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man* (excerpted in the *Beat Reader*) contains an account of a joy ride with Neal a week before he died. He also gets some copy in Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, which I won't read, but you can. And of course there's always *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody*.

Cassady, Carolyn. She plays it less coy and dumb in *Heart Beat* (partial source of the film of the same name, as reprehensible in its own right as the George Peppard *Subterraneans*), but in *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* she either doesn't have a clue or is the biggest liar since Nixon. All this stuff that happened, that the world knows happened—even Nixon knows happened—she acts like she didn't notice. An insider pretending to be an outsider, straighter than Pat Nixon. Sexist it may sound to say this, but say it I will: she had to be at least a third of the reason Neal never wrote dick except the letters, and while not the source of his assholiness, a contributing unmaker of its positive dimension — although fuck him, he had his share of complicity in it — for choosing her and (more or less) sticking around. The items included in *Dear Carolyn*, ten years' worth of letters from Jack, throb with a generosity which, judging from her level of insight in *Off the Road* (none of her letters here), was well over her head, making you wonder what even Jack saw in her (no, it's easy: good-looking broad; stable) (so fuck Jack, too).

Faster...

Gregory Corso is the great Brat of beat (Elf, Imp). An innocent? A primitive? In *The Beat Vision* (ed. Arthur & Kit Knight) he calls himself "poor simple human bones," gets in a fight with Gary Snyder (too "intellectual" for him), is the only one at a writers convention who doesn't find "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed" irredeemably corny. In *The Subterraneans*, he's the one whose sexact with Mardou precipitates the end for Jack. Has poems titled "God Is a Masturbator" (in *Elegiac Feelings American*) and "Don't Shoot the Warthog" (Gasoline). "Columbia Poesy Reading—1975" (*Herald of the Autochthonic Spirit*) is a lively debate between Gregory's capitially Muse and drug-of-choice heroin. In "Bomb" (*The Happy Birthday of Death*) he thumbs his nose, says (from the deathmire of the '50s) what-me-fear-annihilation? (Anti-nuke demonstrators once threw shoes at him.)

Although basically an outsider (slumming? no, but just dropping in), John Clellon Holmes wrote the first beat novel published, *Go* (1952), which pissed Kerouac off (two reasons: jealousy — natch — his own teletype rolls were then dying on the vine; Holmes has his Kerouac character go to bed with the Holmes's wife character, which never happened in life, as cover for Holmes's own real-life infidelity), the first beat piece in the mainstream press ("This Is the Beat Generation," *New York Times* '52, reprinted in *Nothing More to Declare*), and the first beat think piece in the mainstream "lively arts" media ("Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, Feb. '58, a month before Jack's piece of the same name, now in *Good Blonde & Others*; the Holmes piece also in *Declare*). The *Times* article is exactly the sort of two-sided/no-sided glibspeak you find in the *Times* now as then, but at least he acknowledges beat's spiritual dimension. The *Esquire* thing goes out of its way to give credit where due (to Jack for coming up with the term "beat generation," for defining it as religious to begin with). *Go* is simply an itchy, tired-of-the-whole-thing-before-it-even-happened neo-Dostoyevskian calisthenic that feels at best like a New York genre novel (the way *What Makes Sammy Run* is an L.A. novel) — where virtually all of Jack's own writings completely transcend place. Best (and inadvertently silliest) image in the book (p. 306): "...where a few squalid bars forlornly gathered the discontented into gaudy islands of warmth and alcohol." Although he and some biographers claim he and Jack remained "lifelong friends," he only does a couple-few cameo turns in Jack's earlier novels.

Herbert Huncke is the street hustler, junkie, and petty thief from whom Jack had gotten "beat" (w/out the generation). The character based on him in *Go* is a model of vile pus and scum with about a week to live. He's now outlived its author (11 years his junior) by 6 years. In his amiable 1990 autobiography, *Guilty of Everything*, Huncke gets back at Burroughs (for overstating, in *Junkie*, how skinny Huncke's neck seemed in its collar) by detailing how quaint and fastidious Bill had been about his v. first shot of morphine. Describes what a nervous wreck Ginsberg was behind bars —

his “woebegone expression,” “saying Jewish prayers” — the time they got busted together for stolen goods in Allen’s apartment, and claims Edie divorced Jack because he “wasn’t too successful with her sexually.” His image of “awful red stone brick” (p. 46) is the polar opposite of Jack’s ubiquitous “redbrick America.” *The Beat Reader* has a couple of short Huncke prose pieces — very open, reader-friendly narratives.

Carl Solomon, who met Ginsberg in the loony bin Allen opted for in lieu of actual jail time (Solomon was in for more psychologically pressing reasons), was not only the dedicatee of “Howl” but, working for his publisher uncle, the man who got *Junkie* signed to Ace Books (he rejected the teletype-roll *On the Road*). In his two books of prose, *Mishaps, Perhaps and More Mishaps* (their innards scrambled and resequenced, possibly in toto — it’s hard to tell — in *Emergency Messages*, along with some new material including an interview that repudiates the oft-quoted shuck that he saw Artaud perform in Paris in ’47), he reads like a lumbering lummoX—sorry—a lovable lummoX. A typical wheeze: “The Story of Syphilitic Minnie — Vietnik Communist, F.B.I. Lesbian.” (Hey, he doesn’t cause cancer.)

Even more ingenuous is Peter Orlovsky, gentle soul love-mated to Ginsberg — for better and worse — from ’54 to, I dunno, somewhere in the ’80s...or maybe still. Though it’s conceivable that only at Allen’s behest did he ever write poem one (title: “Frist [sic] Poem”), his sole collection, far as may be knowed, *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs*, is my single favorite object from the wide world of bookthings. Really bearable, uncorrected misspellings and all. “Lepers Cry” is reprinted in both *Beat Reader* and *Beat Vision*, but my own favorites are “Frist [sic] Woman Lay” (“3 times/ in the night in Paris — at her place”), “High on H,” and “Dick Tracy’s Yellow Hat.” (And who am I? I’m the reason we’re all still here...this is my beatnik party. On to California...)

Poets Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and Lew Welch went to Reed College together, and when Jack, Allen, and the New York contingent hooked up with them (or the first two of’em, at first) and *their* loosely defined crowd in the mid-’50s Bay Area, whatever it was that Beat was was suddenly national.

Snyder I have trouble figuring out. The way I’ve always had him pegged is as a young smartypants nature poet who in 40 years still hasn’t taken it especially far—never an academic, but still not much danger *in the verse*. He raves about these Zen lunatic mountain men for a whole half-a-book (the “Cold Mountain” part of *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*), but he isn’t one himself. Even the young stuff is not-young. Never celebrates — revels in — his own wildness, except from the vantage point of many calm yrs’ separation (in “Cartagena,” also in *Riprap*, recalling whores of

his late adolescence). In "Four Poems for Robin" (*The Back Country*) he waxes on about skin and heat and gal-nakedness, relinquished in pursuit of "what my karma demands" — that about says it all. "I Went into the Maverick Bar" (*Turtle Island*), an account of drinks and vibes in redneck New Mexico, is Kerouac without the joy, Ginsberg without the bite. "Sherry in July" (*Left Out in the Rain*) is the closest he comes to humor. If Kerouac hadn't captured him *externally* (in *Dharma Bums*) at a moment of still-ebullient whippersnapperhood, how else would we know he was any fun at all?

But maybe this is a bum rap, 'cause actually there are a couple Gary poems I could see myself reading again — "The Bath" (*Turtle Island*), about bathing his son in the sauna, and "Painting the North San Juan School" (*Axe Handles*), which reads like Wm. Carlos Williams with but the *eensiest* jot of hey-this-is-poetry to make you forget it isn't. And there's certainly no denying the validity of everything he SAYS ABOUT THE PLANET in his eco-essays ("The Politics of Ethnopoetics" in *The Old Ways*, "Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival technique" in *Earth House Hold*, most everything in *The Practice of the Wild*). And give him some points for what he says about Bukowski in *The Real Work*: yes, Bukowski is a nature poet — "eating, drinking, farting. What could be more natural?" But none of his poems about Lew Welch (read on, reader) are *good enough*.

Reading Philip Whalen may not be as easy as falling off a log, but it's close. The most appealing, the least axe-to-grind, of why-we-keep-on-keeping-on poets. From *On Bear's Head*, "Prose Take-Out, Portland 13:ix:58" — sun rises — fuck even mentioning it — last jerk awake, everyone else faded (memory of Kerouac, a non-fader, evoked) — inch left to the wine "& the cigarets few"...makes me wanna move to Portland. In "For Kai Snyder" — star of "The Bath" — from *The Kindness of Strangers*, he forgets how to do a somersault — shit — then remembers, does three ("Age 46 years 6 months 37 days"). Bukowski without hemorrhoids? From *Decompressions*, "The Madness of Saul": "Everybody takes me too seriously. / Nobody believes anything I say." Most rudely undersung of living poem-makers (true — but don't take my word for it); currently (last time I looked) an actual bonafide Zen monk.

From *Off the Wall*, a great, uplifting (ah, fuck *me*) series of interviews, we learn he's possibly the only beat writer who doesn't type...peyote saved his life...*non*-topical poetry is revolutionary (and he means it with a HAMMER).

A novel from '67, *You Didn't Even Try* — domestic push-pull and divorce — is nothing to write home about. The story of Lew Welch is, for my money, the most fascinating True Beatnik Tale, more than Jack and Memere, more than Bill, Joan, and William Tell, you name it. The long version, well not that long, it ends at age 44, is told parallel to

that of the other major beat players in Aram Saroyan's *Genesis Angels: The Saga of Lew Welch & the Beat Generation*, my pick for the best-written literary bio of anybody, ever. The short version: grandfather, a surgeon with an operation in the morning, doesn't drink, drives BARRY GOLDWATER'S MOTHER (who does) home from a party, is killed in a collision (Mrs. G. unharmed); young Lew works writing ad copy, comes up with the line "RAID KILLS BUGS DEAD," hates it, hates the life, drops out to join his Reed poet buddies in San Francisco, starves, takes other crummy jobs for which he hates himself, the compromises, drinks too much; two drives across the country with Jack, Lew at the wheel, a surrogate Neal, crucial figure the last gruesome night of *Big Sur*; time marches (still drinking), the adjustments too great, tries living alone in the wilds, squirrels maim his cat, fuggit, the pain, the pain, until finally: writes his greatest poem, "Song of the Turkey Buzzard" (his favorite beast), in which it is asked that no one grieve, that his remains be placed on a rock, hail sweet buzzard, he then disappears in the mountains with his revolver, never to be seen again, Snyder sends out a posse but they never find a trace, no one does (this was '71), the theory being: hiked remote, shot and left himself to be entered into the food chain — quick — direct — et by his friends the buzzards, become *non-metaphoric* ONE WITH NATURE, one with nullity/eternity...whew.

"Buzzard" can be found in *Ring of Bone: Collected Poems 1950-1971*, along with such hotsos as "Wobbly Rock," "Barbara/Van Gogh Poem," "Brown Small Bird," "Supermarket Song," and "Not Yet 40, My Beard Is Already White." Lew's poems are all so consistently of his voice that to pick up any one is to hear *him* in it — as distinctive as a line, a phrase, a held note by the most recognizable jazzmen. And it all has his SMILE.

Evergreen Review # 17 has a prose fragment from *The Man Who Played Himself*, a third-person fictional send-up of hip, that reads something like Terry Southern, but it's still got Lew's smile.

Okay, now let's sort the rest out and get this party over...

Bob Kaufman and John Wieners are the greatest of the non-scene beat poets, whatever that means — the social second unit? — people who didn't spend scads of time with the frontrunners. They're also two supreme sufferers, and Kaufman, in particular, swallowed more broken glass than all the others combined. His mastery of Amen-surrealist wordspew is evident in "Secondless" (in *The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956-1978*): "MINUTE AGES OF TIMELESS TIME & CLOCKLESS CLOCKS, & COCKLESS COCK." Only beat writer, poetry or prose, who pegged jazz really, *totally* right: "Bird with Painted Wings" (*Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*). Wieners's "A Poem for Cocksuckers" and "The Ages of Youth" ("And with great fear I inhabit the middle of

the night”), from *Selected Poems* (Black Sparrow), are intense, to say the least. Kaufman’s “Ginsberg” (*Solitudes*) and Wiener’s “For Huncke” (*Selected Poems*, Grossman) are as great a pair of tributes as ANY any of these guys ever paid one another.

Diane DiPrima is good enough. She’ll do. The percentage of her poetry that’s pap is no worse than for your average superstar academic. She writes decent travel stuff (“Two from Gallup,” “Brief Wyoming Meditation,” “Ramada Inn, Denver”) and occasionally gets one off like “I hope / you go thru hell / tonite / beloved. / I hope / you choke to death / on lumps of stars,” in “More or Less Love Poems” (all in *Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems*). Her *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, the only beat exploitation novel by an insider— wait, no, there’s also Ed Sanders — is a nice functional hunk of smut. Towards the end she fucks Kerouac (verified in *Desolate Angel*).

LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), father of one of her kids, is beat’s only triple threat: passable fiction, poetry, drama. *The System of Dante’s Hell* is the finest novel by any beat other than Kerouac or Burroughs. *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* is as good a first book of poems as you got in those days (1961). *The Toilet* is the best play I ever saw live (’64). Hettie Jones (nee Cohen), mother of two of *his* kids, is the author of the best beat spouse memoir, *How I Became Hettie Jones* (the “skinny” on DiPrima is pretty good).

Michael McClure is the second least interesting poet among the frontrunners. For such a gung-ho nature muhfuh (and unrepentant mammal) he tiptoes through the tulips a little, um, daintily, y’know? There’s also something very *Aryan* about much of his shit — very “stags in the meadow” — or English Protestant church music-y. And these page-centered symmetrical repetition poems seem like ideal fodder for (perish the thought) computer fun and hilarity— but does he ever get the hilarity? *Scratching the Beat Surface* is a dry, dry, dry monograph — so straight, its surface so unbroken. “Peyote Poem” is okay, though, and *Ghost Tantras* has a great werewolf cover, and *The Beard* was the quintessential late-’60s smash-the-boundaries-of-stage-decorum theater event. (Mixed reviews for the prettyboy.)

His role as publisher/bookseller notwithstanding, as a writer Lawrence Ferlinghetti is the least interesting of the bigboys. He’s such a square that hipsterism when he wears it (like in *Coney Island of the Mind*, which isn’t even his title, it’s Henry Miller’s) seems ludicrous. Yet most of his square stuff doesn’t play either. *Tyrannus Nix*?— *his* putdown of Nixon — who cares? So many books, so many books, some of them even published by other companies. And two full-length bios (one of which doesn’t give a vertical inch to LF’s loan of his cabin to Kerouac) — why?

We're outa beer, outa wine....

Ted Joans is the poet (black) who said of his friend Jack, "I know a man who's neither white nor black/And his name is Jack Kerouac." His ending to "God Blame America!!" (*A Black Manifesto in Jazz Poetry and Prose*) follows "America...FUCK YOU!" with "MAY I?" The direct (friendship) link between Kerouac and Charlie Parker.

In the introduction to Jack Micheline's *River of Red Wine*, which Troubadour Press agreed to publish only if he could get "somebody famous" to write a prefatorial, an obliging Kerouac says, "I like the poetry of Jack Micheline. See?" and I don't mind it either. It's meant to be read, is easy to read, and in fact only when read — aloud does it seem like much. Title poem (1981) from *Imaginary Conversation with Jack Kerouac* opens with "Wacky Daky Doo," moves on to "Yippie Yippie Loo," finishes with "Long Live Harold Goldfinger!"

Of the five people who read at the historic Six Gallery whoozis, S.F., '55 — Ginsberg (unveiling "Howl"), Snyder, Whalen, McClure, Philip Lamantia—the one with the least currently in print under his own name is Lamantia, who didn't read his own verse that night anyway: nothing. (Listed in the City Lights catalogue, but I've never seen him even in the artso specialty stores.) Only five short things in the *Beat Reader* if *that's* still in print, all with a fair quota of self-conscious nuttiness. The image "reality sandwiches" ("Fud at Foster's") recurs as (is the source of?) the title of a subsequent Ginsberg City Lights collection.

Ray Bremser is a jailbird who willed himself into a poet, hooking up via mail with Ginsberg, Corso, LeRoi Jones while serving six yrs. for armed robbery. *Beat Reader* has something of his, "Funny Lotus Blues," with a lot of parentheses and gratuitous variable indents, verse-critiquing Nat King Cole, Rosemary Clooney, and Thelonious Monk, image-dropping Tanu Tuva, pubic hair, and Nero Wolfe. *Troia: Mexican Memoirs*, an excerpt of which also appears in the *Reader*, is a conspicuously Kerouacian account by wife Bonnie (Brenda Frazer) of their flight (with baby Rachel) from the law, written while Ray was serving another five-year stretch. In Elias Wilentz and Fred McDarrah's *The Beat Scene* (1960) there's a great snap of him reading with shades on.

Tuli Kupferberg, the best mind of his generation to have jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge and lived (vaguely cameo'd in "Howl"), once asserted (in *The War Against the Beats*): "Listen Square—You may kill the Beatnik, but you will not kill the Beatnik in yourself." In 1964 he and Ed Sanders (along with Ken Weaver) formed the Fugs, the bulk of whose greatest work has been reissued on two Fantasy CDs, *The Fugs First Album* and *The Fugs Second Album*. In the mid-'70s Sanders, responsible for the

term “peacecreep,” put out a great country-western parody album, *Sanders' Truckstop*, with its unforgettable “Polaroid spread shot” refrain (“The Maple Court Trajedy”), but his principal calling is words-on-paper. “Elm-Fuck Poem” (“in to the oily crotch/ place dick”) and “The V.F.W. Crawling Contest” (*Thirsting for Peace in a Raging Century: Selected Poems, 1961-1985*) are good samples of his poetic craft. *Tales of Beatnik Glory* starts pretty funny, but the kneejerk ha-ha of its prose is a little tough to sustain for 543 (revised edition) pages.

Says the cover blurb to Lenore Kandel’s second book, *Word Alchemy*, that bk. and her first, *The Love Book*, “openly celebrate sexual love” — you could say so. “Invocation for Maitreya”: “sweet cunt-mouth of world serpent Ouroboros girding the universe / as it takes in its own eternal cock.”

There’s a famous photo from North Beach of Ginsberg, McClure, and Bob Kaufman with Harold Norse and Jack Hirschman, so I guess you should include HN and JH. Hirschman translated Artaud for *City Lights* (“Shit to the Spirit” is especially juicy). In 1986 I read with him in L.A., and he was so intense he actually drooled — very impressive. “The Halls of Academe” (*Endless Threshold*) is as vigorous and thoroughgoing a slam of said haunts as y’may ever encounter. Harold Norse’s *Beat Hotel* is a first-rate cutup/ellipsis novel from his days at that Parisian hostelry, where he met Gysin and Burroughs. Good grim poem in *Karma Circuit*: “Another Form of Junk.” His *Memoirs of a Bastard Angel* spends less time on Beat than some might prefer, more on superstars he hath known (Tennessee Williams, Chester Kallman, Truman Capote).

Likewise, the black & white of David Meltzer with McClure, Lamantia, John Wieners, S.F. ’58, argues strongly for *his* inclusion. (And the name is right.) From *Bark, a Polemic*: “Pass around pics of chicks in black patent-leather boots, pink bras, fucked by wolfhounds, German shepherds, St. Bernards. Motel-room camera gets it all” — I would certainly hope so.

Time to mop up.

Let’s see. Aside from *Beat Reader*, *Beat Scene*, *Beat Vision*, let’s see what’s left.

The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men (ed. Gene Feldman, Max Gartenberg) clearly doesn’t know what beat is —1958 — classifying Anatole Broyard and Chandler Brossard as beats along with Jack, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Solomon — pshaw. *The Beats*, Seymour Krim’s 1960 beat-sploitation anthology, has lots more real stuff, but it also has pieces by Broyard and Brossard, along with Norman Mailer (and not even Mailer’s dick-driven criticism — “The White Negro” is in both the

above collection and *Beat Reader*— but excerpts from *The Deer Park*, prefaced by Krim's comment that "Mailer is moving these days, carving out his own version of beat vision" — Mailer as beat!) and an early scuzz-out by that beat-bashing pigfucker Norman Podhoretz, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians." *Kerouac & Friends: A Beat Generation Album*, edited/photographed by Fred McDarrah, has some terrific photos, including Jack on drums ('58) and Hettie Jones w/ Joyce Glassman, but also some historic texts like Gilbert Milstein's *New York Times* review of *On the Road*, Dan Wakefield's and Howard Smith's write-ups of Jack at the Village Vanguard, Al Aronowitz's profile of Ginsberg for some skin mag, Diana Trilling's hysterical "motherly" account of Allen (her husband Lionel's former student) reading at his alma mater, Columbia, and "Begone, Dull Beats," Ralph Gleason's report on how, ugh, tiresome the North Beach scene had become by the dawn of the sixties. John Tytell's *Naked Angels* tells us nothing we don't know or couldn't otherwise find (or figure) out about Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs (e.g., Jack's naturalism is "different" from that of Upton Sinclair or James Baldwin; Allen, like Wm. Blake, "is seeking to purge language of stultifying formalisms"). The new afterword to Bruce Cook's recently reprinted '71 throwaway, *The Beat Generation: The Tumultuous '50s Movement and Its Impact on Today*, shows/tells how e-z he is to please: the cultural legacy of the Beats (long may it Wave!) is Richard Brautigan, Tom Robbins, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits...Maynard G. Krebs, anyone?

The New American Poetry (1960, ed. Donald Allen) contains a ton of items not in the *Beat Reader*. The revised edition, retitled *The Postmoderns* ('82, Allen w/ George F. Butterick), has a ton, but a different ton (notable deletions: Stuart Perkoff, Kirby Doyle). In *Whitman's Wild Children*, Neeli Cherkovski does in-depth treatments on ten poets who have taken "to the open road both spiritually and physically," seven of them beats, including Bob Kaufman, John Wieners, and Harold Norse (spotlighting Norse's poem "I'm Not a Man": powerful ain't the word), who rarely get such credit. In Ekbert Faas's *Towards a New American Poetics*, the split is only two poets in six, and the two are Ginsberg (who it turns out didn't really "study" Whitman until after "Howl") and Snyder (amused the beats had to take so much shit for being crazed — while the Anne Sextons and John Berrymans are *really* out there).

In spite of wasting an entire CD on their catalogue staple Lenny Bruce (certainly not hurting for availability), Fantasy Records' four-CD *Howls, Raps & Roars* is as sweeping, as delightful, a celebration of what it purports to document — "the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance"—as you're gonna find in this life. Readings by everybody from Ginsberg to Whalen to Welch to Wieners and Lamantia — now you can tag voice and nuance to a wide swath of mere ink on paper. You can even hear/feel Peter Orlovsky's abiding *intelligence*. McClure reading to a roaring lion at the S.F. Zoo has to be one of his (and poetry's) great documented acts.

In comparison, the Rhino/Word Beat three-CD box, *The Beat Generation*, is a potpourri of bullcrap, a sicker heap of exploitation trash than any '50s/'60s installment. Aside from an interview with Kerouac by Ben Hecht (which shows you exactly how shy and uncomfortable Jack could be), Burroughs reading a short *Naked Lunch* excerpt, and some material by Jack and Ginsberg available elsewhere, the vast majority of this set's 48 cuts are either jazz qua time-capsule "sound bites" (Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Ventura) or self-conscious parodies/ripoffs of things in and around beat ("Kookie's Mad Pad," "Beatnik's Wish" by Patsy Raye & the Beatniks, "Christopher Columbus Digs the Jive" by John Drew Barrymore, "No Pictures, Please" by ROD MCKUEN, two Tom Waits cuts). Projected "intentions" aside, what basically this IS is a bloodsuck of much that is holy, a celebration of beat as a silly, disposable JOKE (w/ soundtrack). Which is fine — hey — if you wanna document lame comedy, swell. You wanna throw in a couple of lame-o's for laughs, okay. But if THIS is your ultimate sonic mega-document of BEAT, eat shit, daddy-o. (I really mean it.)

Speaking of jokes: Lawrence Lipton's 300-page '59 press release on the Venice Beats, *The Holy Barbarians* — a scream. Better, however, you should first read *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California*, John Arthur Maynard's astonishing '91 account of Lipton's recruitment and stage direction of a handful of poets and fringe beach people into a scene modeled after New York's and San Francisco's, but oh, so much more *advanced*, see: sort of a Beat, The Next Generation (with Lipton as ringmaster/ad copyist). The poets — Stuart Perkoff, John Thomas, an imported (from Europe/N.Y.) Alexander Trocchi — get more meaningful play from Maynard than they ever got from Lipton. The complete text of Perkoff's response to Ginsberg's nude L.A. reading of '56 (not in print anywhere else) is especially enlightening. Maynard's take, tho, on Trocchi's prose opus, *Cain's Book*, as principally a love song to heroin is so off the mark that you get to wondering whether he read the whole thing, and/or whether he's also wrong about a lot of other stuff. Dunno.

John Thomas, by the way, is still alive and kicking. His 1990 *Nevertheless* is as fine a stack of single-page poesy as any I've seen in the last dozen years. Short verse that reads like short prose — but is more compact than prose — stronger — and more lucid.

All in the family: Jan Kerouac; Louis Ginsberg; Wm. Burroughs, Jr. Imagine a daughter of Jack opening a novel — her first — with an epigraph from a PAUL SIMON song — *Baby Driver* — if that don't beat all. In "Now a Satellite" (*Morning in Spring and Other Poems*) Allen's father rhymes "risen" and "prison," "an ion" and "Orion." Speed,

Bill's son's first, is funny, grim as life itself, non-derivative of dad, no B.S., but with his next (and last), *Kentucky Ham*, he's already out of things to say.

File under beat: Bob Dylan; Ann Waldman; San Diego's own Lester Bangs. Dylan's an easy choice, although the lyrics Ann Charters picked for *Beat Reader* ("Blowin' in the Wind," "The Times They Are A-Changin' ") are more Woody Guthrie than Ginsberg-and-beyond (why not "Positively Fourth Street" and "Memphis Blues Again"?). His *Tarantula*, especially in the A. J. Weberman pirate edition, is everything you could want from a beat novel (cameo appearance by Ernest Tubb). Waldman I'll accept although she's the same age as I am, if only because everybody else accepts her (based mostly on her connection to Ginsberg at Naropa), and if you give me a minute I'll find something to endorse...hmm...okay, "Queer Heart" ("Kiss pussy, Mother Country") in *Fast Speaking Woman*. Lester is younger than me, much younger — the dead don't age — but he ate all these guys for breakfast, along with the inhalers, and *Big Sur* is as good a blueprint, at least a cipher, for his death at 33, 34, whatever it was, as any you could offer. I thought "Women on Top: Ten Post-Lib Role Models for the Eighties" (in the posthumous *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*) was incredible — weirder and weirder misspellings while drinking Romilar — until I read *Old Angel Midnight*. Now I know what he was aiming for.

Don't file (even if Charters did): Frank O'Hara. It don't matter how good you are: y'can't be a curator of the Museum of Modern Art and qualify as beatnik.

Good night.

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Best Of

Richard Meltzer's visit to the dentist is a brush with death

Tooth and nail

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[April 16, 1987](#)

Feature Stories



Jack Nicholson dentist scene in *Little Shop of Horrors*, 1960.

I've never had any sexual interest in a dental hygienist, though I'm told there are dentists who pike, pursue, and occasionally even marry them.

Dentists themselves are difficult to imagine as sex objects for anyone, and Laura Bryant's January 1929 recording of "Dentist Chair Blues (part One)" — "I need a quick-filling dentist 'cause I'm mean and cross/At night I'm hot with fever and I just roll and toss" — can hardly be regarded as more than a pre-Crash novelty of the most pathetic sort. Nor, unless we're Jack Nicholson in *Little Shop of Horrors*, can we take Dinah Washington's "Long John Blues" — "You thrill me when you drill me" (he's a dentist, see) — with anything but a grain of that salty stuff, that, diet permitting, we sprinkle on eggs.

A rich source of "double entendre," perhaps, but if they stopped drilling — let's say they *hammered* — they'd cease even being good for that. They'd be good for nothing, and yet....

And yet the metaphor, the poem, the image composite ... sex/pain, pain/sex, "pain less dentistry"/yank, yank, yank ... does kind of persist with a certain eerie *je ne sais* potency. One that isn't wholly comic.

Okay, I was in for a cleaning. New dentist — always a new one. I'm more fickle with dentists than the Fickleson Sisters. A new one, and so long since my last cheery

"visit," that the dental facewear had changed — radically. And handwear. Gloves and masks where previously there were none.

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Yes, apparently, the dread contagion of AIDS had altered another lifestyle. The *dental* lifestyle. The noisome workspace of drillers, yankers, and their ilk has forever been transformed, a new poetic resonance subjoining itself to their sour, grimy chore. The heck with sex and pain; sex and *death* has become the couplet wherever molars seeks service and relief.

Tristan and Isolde meet Walter Matthau in *Cactus Flower*.... Romeo and Juliet rub teeth with Henry Zuckerman in Roth's *The Counterlife*.... A grander theme enters the frame.

But of course, it's *extra*-dentist-chair sex that has drawn the Reaper to the dental sanctum. Basic sack sex or even just ... blood contact. Blood and spittle — let's not forget spit — a little mouth blood has struck FEAR in their dark dental hearts.

Dentists have never minded draining my blood. Three yankers ago, I lost between a pint and a quart when the jerk nicked an artery during a "routine" wisdom extraction. Four dentists (and another wisdom tooth) back, I lost a pint from just a vein.

So it felt so-o-o great to see, well, maybe not a dentist, but his hygienist lackey wince, *cringe*, every time her tool struck capillary paydirt. And it wasn't from the mere sight of blood — that tired, old number. It was the *meaning* of blood. Blood and pestilence. Blood as death. My blood and saliva spiraling down the sink. I gaze at the lackey's panicky blues as they gazed — at the spiral. Blood, spit 'n' panic. Look who's squeamish now!!

And the lamb turns on the table of the butcher.

Speaking of which, butchers, what the *actual* butchers gonna do — and how far off can this be? — when the first lucky heifer with HTLV-III up her privates starts spreading it to the steer, i.e., beef population? Slaughterhouses, butcher shops — all this *possibly* tainted blood flying 'round, landing in people's eyes, nostrils, freshly scratched bug bites and etc. Soaking their socks, entering their systems through lesions in their athlete's foot. What're they gonna do, dress like astronauts?

And what happens when we the meat-buying public start to notice and ask pointed questions requiring frank answers? *Thorough cooking kills the virus, see. Well-done*

is safest. Medium, slightly less so. Rare, make out your will, Jack. Rumors of illicit cow-poking at the Double-R-Bar Ranch will get nasty. It should be interesting....

Back to dental love, though — glove. You could bite through 'em easy. As she slips digits gumward, take whiff. You could bite through 'em easy, but the bite threat has always been there. Always — yet it's never made a dent in dental arrogance, indomitably. The butchers have persisted, they've persisted in spades.

So I'm thinking, hey! *Now's* the time to put our teeth IN it. The eternal quid pro quo, the trade-off we've for too long declined — take it! Cuspids through rubber, incisors through glove. Slap some blood curdly *terror* — not this trendy cautionary biz — on their pastel golf-playing face.

Tell 'em Meltzer sent ya.

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Best Of

CD review: Alan Lechusza/Christopher Adler Duo, Pleistocene

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[Sept. 7, 2000](#)

Blurt Music News

There's nothing wrong with this — it's great.

Oh, okay — so what izzit?

Two guys playing, well, one of 'em's on saxophone, two saxes actually — soprano and baritone — and the other on piano. Free jazz, or free enough, in a certain sense very Coltrane-y, in others not at all.

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Lechusza, in his own wds., or those of a sympathetic colleague or lackey, "brings a subtle control over timbre, multiphonics, extended techniques, and a boundless melodic inventiveness to a comprehensive arsenal of wind instruments" — yup, he does. 'Specially on baritone.

Adler, meantime, “brings to the piano a harmonic richness and power taken from his years as an organist, coupled with a sensitivity to nuance and melody developed through years of study of Asian musics.” I’ll take your wd. for it.

The look of a classic ECM LP: cover photo, title, everything. But with a lot more (how you say?) balls in both musique und production.

All you could want from a 68-minute saxophone-piano album.

All?

Or reasonably close.

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Gore and Kolender's lawyer hired by Orange County, but not without criticism

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Best Of

The Magnificent Meatsticks

Author

[Richard Meltzer](#)

Publish Date

[July 27, 2000](#)

Blurt Music News

CD review: *The Magnificent Meatsticks*, MP3.com

You can download all of this from www.mp3.com/magmeat, including a little ditty called "Richard Meltzer Is My Fucking Hero" — I kid you not. But it couldn't be me they're talkin' — like who the heck am I to merit an homage? If you go to Amazon.com, you'll notice there's *another* Richard Meltzer, co-editor (w/ Cees Visser and Gerard Kan) of *Echocardiography in Coronary Artery Disease (Developments in Cardiovascular Medicine, 80)*, Kluwer Academic Publishers (April 1988), usually ships within 4–6 weeks (\$197.50). THAT'S who it's gotta be addressed to.

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It's raucous, it's rawky, and above all RUDE, very rude. They're telling this medical Meltzer, probably a doc or a SCIENTIST or somethin', to come on over and **fk them in the bt...**ooh, naughty. On account of he's their hero. (They'll do *anything* for the dude.)

The Terry in "Never Trust a Guy Named 'Terry' " is Terry Terwilliger, quarterback for the old L.A. Dons of the All America Football Conference. And why not trust him? He threw SIX interceptions in a playoff game.

This is my-t-good stuff...and it's free!

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Columbia Records is proud to announce the release of *Songs from DAWSON'S CREEK — Vol. II. Songs from DAWSON'S CREEK — Vol. II* provides a first listen to the hitmakers of tomorrow. Just as with its predecessor, *Songs from DAWSON'S CREEK — Vol. I*, material was chosen for both musical excellence and connection to the themes of the show. *Songs from DAWSON'S CREEK — Vol. II* will be in stores November 3.

Oh, really? Well, I for one could not give a flying son of a hotcold ratty-ass fart. Ellery Eskelin is in town, beside which all PALES.

— **OF NOTE**, *Richard Meltzer*, November 2, 2000

Ten Years Ago

People "hate" Richard Meltzer (Pop Music, June 1)? Not I. Without his Thursday column, it's the same old grind: no thanks to anything on Friday, worse new fall lineup on Saturday, David and Saul and the Philistine foreskins on Sunday, comfort of cliché on Monday, willed nonexistence of Tuesday, throwin' money with Puffy goodnuff by Wednesday, and Thursday, if not for Meltzer's column...the Neckoning, for which only Henry Rollins is prepared.

— **LETTERS: "I DON'T HATE MELTZER,"** *Amanda Coutts*, *Rancho Santa Fe*, June 15, 2000

Fifteen Years Ago

I don't know ANYTHING about the O.J. trial, I don't CARE about the O.J. trial, I'm not even CONCERNED that the trial will be fair ('cause how could it be?), and the only thing all this O.J. biz has done for MY homelife is to strengthen my desire, fortify my resolve to get the fuck out of L.A.

— **"BIGGEST TWEAK SINCE THE IRAQ WAR,"** *Richard Meltzer, February 9, 1995*

Twenty Years Ago

Please use whatever means possible to persuade Richard Meltzer to write more articles for your paper. Not only is he funny, but cynical without getting nasty like some of your other writers do. His story about Kobey's Swap Meet Santa-ing was great. What a perceptive guy.

You guys should make sure he doesn't go write for some other paper. This probably means you'll have to pay him more money.

— **LETTERS: "MELTZERIAN SUPREMACY,"** *Lisa Anderson, Golden Hill, January 11, 1990*

Fifteen Years Ago

Ten, 12 years ago I was talking to some small-press jerk, a publisher of pamphlets and broadsides and occasional 40-page books and such, who didn't much care for the Beats. His idea of a Real Poet was somebody like James Merrill. Artuad to him was Not a poet, and Wallace Stevens was vastly preferable to Ezra Pound, who in turn was preferable to William Carlos Williams. His bottom line on Beats was they had nothing much to offer beyond the ambiguous (libertine) gushings and spoutings of any other Bohemian lit cult, and his only interest in 'em — historically — was that much of their early work saw its first light of print in venues like his, though his own whimsical notion of publishing destiny was more on the order of being absorbed someday as an imprint of Knopf than spreading/thriving mushroom-like, City Lights-like, on its own enduring compost patch of back-catalogue populism.

— **"BEAT LIT WRIT LARGE,"** *Richard Meltzer, December 15, 1994*

Twenty Years Ago

Richard Meltzer's contribution to "This Is San Diego" in the April 28 issue is a remembrance of youthful fun during a visit here in 1969. In it he recalls his elation in just having beaten the draft in the days of Vietnam.

Mr. Meltzer's gifted prose is reminiscent of what is described in a First World War poem by Wilfred Owen.

— **LETTERS: "REMEMBERS AN OLD ROUTINE,"** *Douglas Sharpe, May 5, 1988*

Twenty Years Ago

Hi. You know me. I'm the guy who hates this place. No, no change, I still hate it, but I just got back from that "other" place and would like to share with you how loathsome it's become. It's the North American Calcutta.

'scuse me, I don't mean to besmirch the Third World — but it's getting there. It's gotten so you can't walk half a block without facing the face of misery. And by half-block, I mean "good" neighborhoods: Upper East Side, Gramercy Park. At Sixth Ave. between West Third St. and West Fourth, it's more like every half-step.

—**"I [DON'T HEART] NY,"** *Richard Meltzer, January 21, 1988*

Twenty Years Ago As homes go, well, there are really only three types of middle-class homes, households, in America: squares, hipsters, and yuppies. My sis and her hubby are squaresville incarnate; benign squares but what can ya do? "Lenny, it's time to prune the azaleas" (but they don't vote for Reagan) -- that sort of biz. -- **"TOWN & COUNTRY,"** *Richard Meltzer, November 5, 1987*

Twenty Years Ago DATELINE SQUARESVILLE -- It's around Xmas, and parties, well, parties are not what I'm after. I'd rather watch mold grow, I'd rather do the frigging laundry, but I've got this gal, see, who drags me to a screaming *mother* humper of a gathering at which nonretarded children -- and interested adults -- are induced to sing happy birthday to Jesus. I'm thoroughly revolted -- what's this earth coming to? -- **"THE MIND'S ROAD TO GOLF,"** *Richard Meltzer, June 11, 1987*

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Best Of

Loathsome Rockwrite Shuck

Author

David Stampone

Publish Date

April 19, 2007

Blurt Music News

Veteran Portland garage-pop duo the Bugs includes S.D. native and Grossmont High School grad Michael Coumatos. On the band's new vinyl LP, Paul Haines and Coumatos alternate singer-guitarist and drummer duties on 18 stripped-down tunes that ask existentialist questions and/or pose political predicaments: "You say that you wanna kill the president.../ But you can't afford the dynamite and still pay the rent..."

Coumatos sings in four languages, including a Greek song he learned from relatives when visiting the old country. Erstwhile S.D. songbird Lana Rebel, also now based in Oregon, joins in for some countrified guest vox.

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But what's getting the record extra play are liner notes by rock-criticism forefather Richard Meltzer, 61, also of Portland. (North County resident Paul Williams is believed to have given Meltzer his first writing work in 1967, for his *Crawdaddy!* magazine.)

Meltzer's notes: "First things first. Unless there's a pressing need, like say you're genuinely psychotic, or less likely, in the thrall of an actual inspiration or idea (other than 'glory'...other than 'scoring'), nobody should be wasting his/her sacred/profane oo-poo-pa-doo playing Rock-A-Roll anymore -- NOBODY, y'hear?... Before you start a band, or join a band, it is better by far that you pump gas; change the deep fat at Wendy's; fish pennies out of urinals at NASCAR hoedowns; return to school and get a degree in Pus Farming.... All that said, I, the none too shabby R*i*c*h*a*r*d

M*e*!t*z*e*r, formerly R. Meltzer, Rockwriter Emeritus, originator of the whole sorry, loathsome rockwrite shuck, herewith endorse this dandy longplayer by the LONE EXCEPTION to any and all of the above...Bugs!!! Dig it, people: the Bugs are the flying fucking *shit*."

"He's been familiar with us for years...and seems to genuinely think we are not horrible," explains Haines. "When we started scheming about turning our 'masterpiece' CD-R into vinyl, we decided to ask him to do the liner notes. We figured we'd known him for years without hitting him up for a favor or acting like slavering fanboys, so why not ask. If he'd said no, we would've understood and it wouldn't have been a big deal; but he said yes, and we were stoked! I brought him a sack of vegetables (mostly potatoes) from one of the farmers' markets that I work at, in trade."

The Bugs play the Tower Bar this Friday, April 20.

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The very early days of computers in San Diego

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Fortunate Son: “Working class American-Chinese food”

I pause to think about how much of a staple these things have been in my life.

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[Best Of](#)

Richard Meltzer's New Gig

Author

[Andrew Hamlin](#)

Publish Date

[June 6, 2012](#)

[Musician Interviews](#)



Dean of American rock critics Robert Christgau, who edited him, called the guy an “antisocial jerk” as a person and “terrific” as a writer. Jackson Browne, all his dollars notwithstanding, never forgave him for referring to the singer-songwriter as “one hell of a prototype sex symbol for the gay rock underground.” And his take on

working for the *Reader*: “The people of San Diego get the best sampling of my precious bodily fluids.”

Richard Meltzer, scourge and scandal of American rock criticism, sounds affable when reached by phone at his home in Portland, Oregon. Resigned, yes — more resigned than bitter, now — but affable. He takes a moment to say “goodbye to the wife,” who’s on her way out on an errand.

Spielgusher, Meltzer’s poetry/rant/rock collaboration with former Minutemen bassist Mike Watt, is out now. Dig it, and look up what the cat wrote in the past.

Meltzer: How are things at that there paper?

Hamlin: You haven’t been with them for awhile.

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Meltzer: They fired me twice, over the years, yeah.

Hamlin: For what and what?

Meltzer: In the late 1990s they dumped me just to cut costs, then they brought me back to write these silly concert blurbs — they had three or four people doing it. I wrote that till about 2003, and one premise was that I could write whatever I wanted. It didn’t have to be nonfiction. I think I insulted...whatever. Mr. Boss took offense at it, in its waning months. The autocrat in charge.

How did you first make contact with Mr. Watt about doing the *Spielgusher* project?

The whole thing goes back 25 years. I was going to record with the full Minutemen, and then D. Boon died. I’d run into Mike, and he’d say, “Eh, maybe we could revive it somehow.” Ultimately he wanted me to just record maybe an hour’s worth of texts, to which he would eventually add music. And so I think I was finished with that around ’03 or ’04, and he took his time — which was the right amount of time. These things need to lie low for awhile before they become genuine. And finally it happened, and I was very gratified.

How far back do the texts go?

Mike said he recently found, like, 17, which were in D. Boon's pocket when [Boon's fatal accident] occurred. Maybe 10 of them, from the original batch, are on *Spiegelgusher*, which means they would have gone back to the early '80s.

Originally the notion of poetry to me was that I didn't write much of it. And once I did, for the purpose of doing readings, people asked me to do these readings. So I had to write poems. I had to write texts that were readable off a page, and to do that you need all this white space. A poem is a spatial thing. Prose is harder to read, unless you reformat it, and so by the time of the original project, I had maybe 50 readable poems. I picked the ones I had the most affection for.

Did Watt tell you how his recording of the music went down?

He was in Japan...and these two good friends of his who didn't know much English. They would just work up these rudimentary musical structures. He would sometimes explain to them what the texts were about, but I'm assuming in many cases they didn't even know. Which is fine with me.

How did you get into listening to the Minutemen?

I had this punk-rock show on KPFK in L.A. from '79 to '81, and somewhere in the course of that the Minutemen put out some singles, some EPs. I thought they were great, and then I got a package from Watt containing some of the stuff...I still have it...wait a second. [Pause while Meltzer goes to look.]

I saved the letter that he sent me. It's October 5, 1981, and it's written in runny blue ink...it's a little hard to read [he laughs]. It says, "Sorry for the fuckup with the ink, Mr. Meltzer. We're a tiny label from San Pedro, close to Marineland, that has sent you promos of our first four releases. What we would like to know is this: Did you get them? Did you write anything about them? Do you think we're assholes and should leave you alone? Please reply to the above and add any other questions, comments, if you want. Thanks, Mike Watt."

So we slowly but surely became friends. By '81 the whole L.A. punk scene, the first generation, had basically waned, and as far as I was concerned the whole scene just fell apart. The Minutemen were the next generation. I don't even know what their colleagues of the next generation were. I got more serious about writing. I stayed home and wrote my stuff.

But the Minutemen were always, to me, the trench warriors that I felt were with the same basic principles that had been part of punk in '76 and '77. Here's this guy

[Watt] who still does 400 shows a year. Incredible to be that prolific, and for a lifetime. And he was in many ways an inspiration for me, to get my nose to the grindstone, write what has to be written. As opposed to what these crummy mags are asking of me. Doing my own mission.

What would you say is your mission?

In my early years as a writer I didn't really think that writing was that important. Music was better, painting was better — what the hell is writing? And then one day I'd been writing five years or something, and I looked at myself in the mirror: You're a writer! Dig it!

In L.A., nobody ever read a book. Literally nobody I knew ever read books. It seemed to me that the world was getting dumber and dumber, and there was a need to articulate...let's call it "the truth." Or at least the wider gamut of considerations about this thing called life.

Today, even that world is gone. I don't have a cell phone, I don't do social networking, I don't even know what that stuff is. But I somehow imagine that it has nothing to do with writing, it has nothing to do with thought. It's just an impulse, like smoking cigarettes [laughs]. But in those days, I thought there was still a little bit of light under the door.

We have no more light under the door?

The light is out. And so be it. ■

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Walter Mencken's guide to self-quarantine

Former *San Diego Reader* writers – Richard Meltzer, Anne Albright, Duncan Shepherd, Judith Moore – offer their suggestions

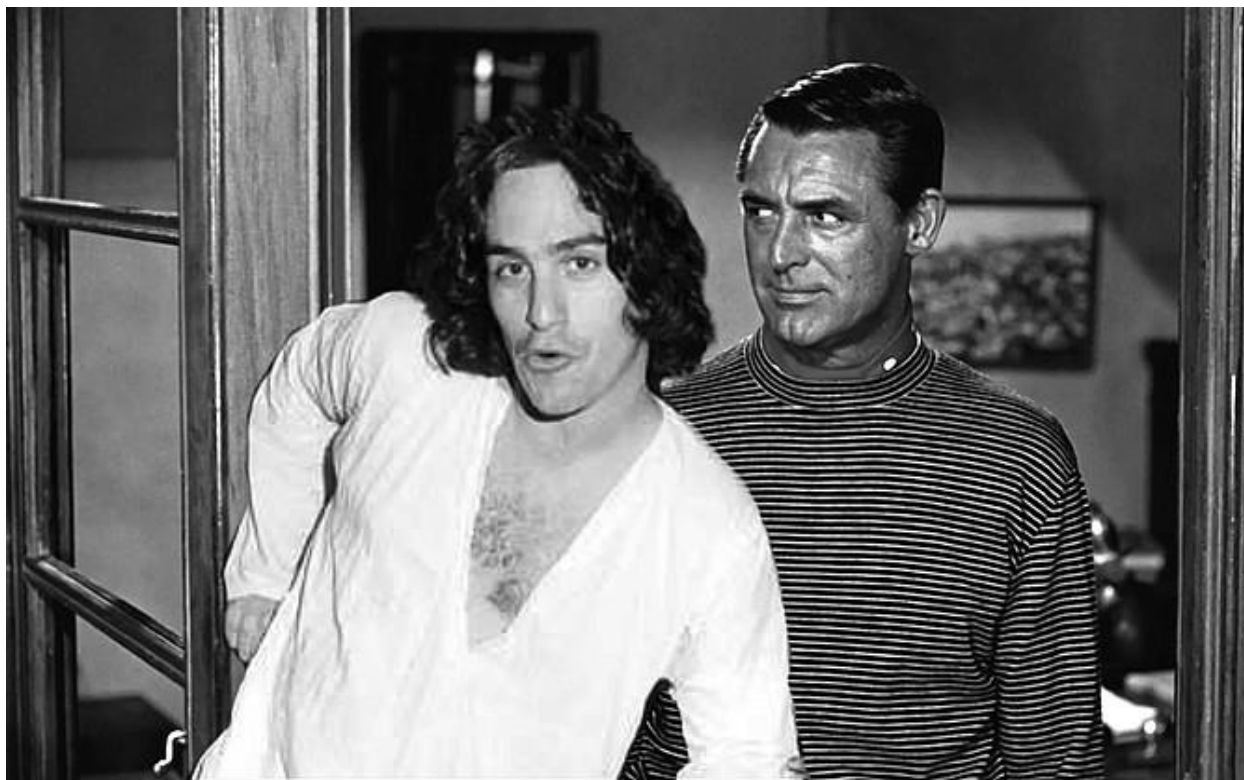
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Meltzer and Mencken, backstage at The Rapsallion after a Hitchcock and Bull show. We were going to change the world, he and I.

Walter Mencken [descending stairs]: Oh, hello! Welcome to my humble abode, situated in the renovated bomb shelter on the estate of Mt. Helix's famous Grindle House. (As ever, don't try to find it on Google Maps; it's not that kind of famous.)

Alistair Cookie [seated]: A-hem.

WM: Ah. Right. Our humble abode. Times being what they are in the Almost Factual News racket, my living situation has gone from serenely solitary to something rather more complicated. Allow me to introduce Mr. Alistair Cookie.

WM: Right. It seems that coronavirus is forcing all sorts of people to social distance themselves all the way into self-quarantine. And Alistair and I got to talking about how the first thing most people will do is start streaming this or that show on this or that electronic screen...



AC: ... and in all likelihood, that will also be the last thing they do. They'll binge. They'll let the algorithm take hold and pour a hot stream of freshly curated content all over their eyeballs — and souls. For days. Weeks, even. It's unconscionable. I'm not an addict, but I play one on TV, and so I know what a tragedy it is to hand over one's free will and powers of discernment. That's why I've requested Walter's help in gathering a few *Almost Factual Reader* writers from days gone by, in the hopes that they can provide some sound counsel regarding What To Watch and How to Live in these dread latter days.

WM: And for those keeping score at home, remember, these are *Almost Factual* interviews, nothing more. Let's start things off with a (Lester) Bang(s), shall we?

Richard Meltzer was once described by the late *Village Voice* — once the largest free weekly in the country — as “the greatest rock critic so far,” with an ability “to get the prose alive on the page that probably surpasses Burroughs’s or Twain’s or Faulkner’s.” For us, he wrote little squibs that sometimes sort of related to various bands coming to town, plus several longish pieces about fellow seminal rock critic and El Cajon native Lester Bangs. Richard?

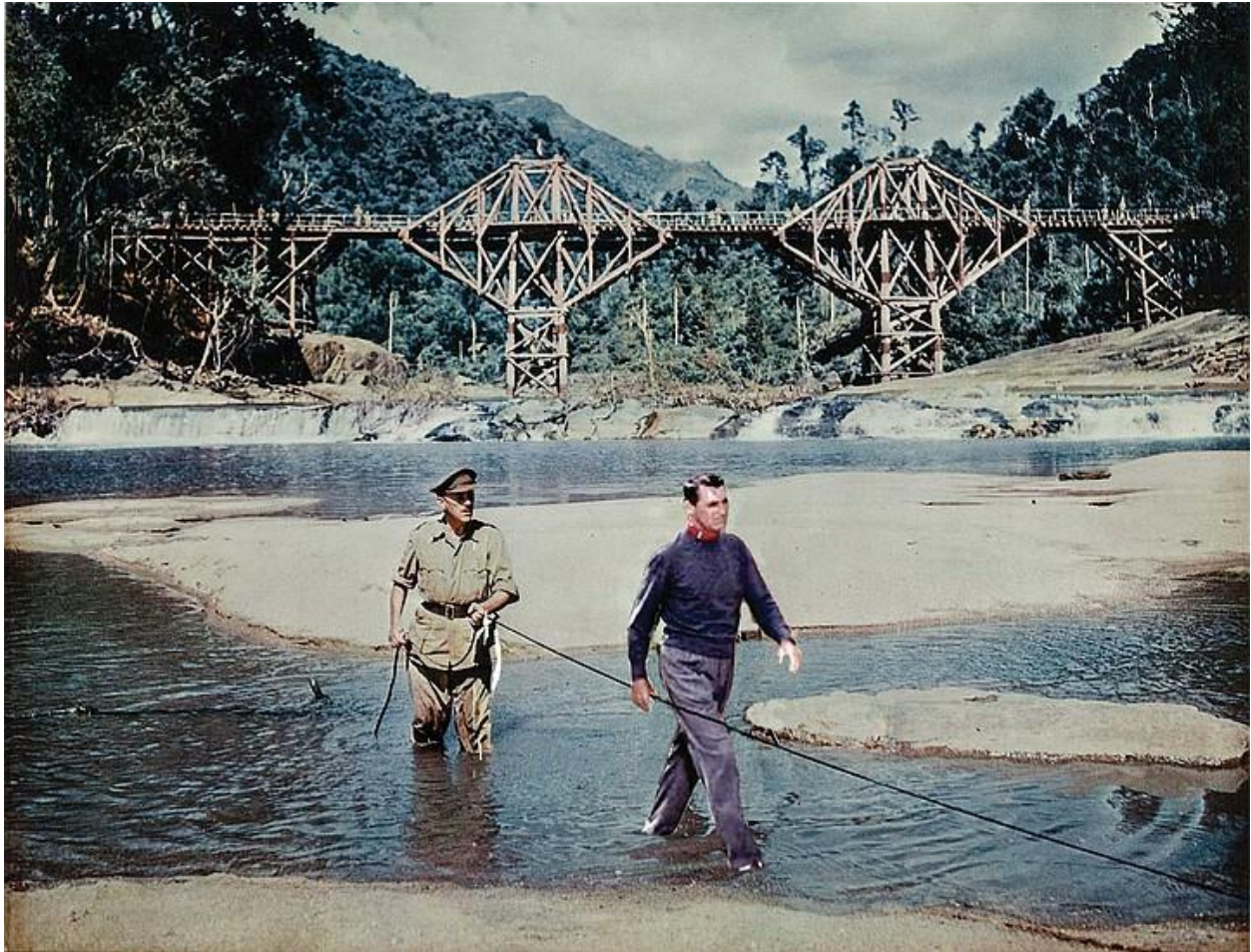


Richard Meltzer: Well, well, well, here I seem to be again, the proverbial bad penny turning up, having been offered only marginally more than the proverbial penny for my thoughts — I suppose there just aren’t as many coppers in the coffers these days, what with coronavirus and any number of other sicknesses ailing the weekly rag industry, to say nothing of the general public, suffering as it does from the debilitating symptom of a lost appetite for the printed word, to the point where just recently, that great print organ *Playboy* magazine (pun regretfully intended) went on what is likely to prove a permanent hiatus — but still happy, or at the very least (and it is very near the very least) willing, to offer my proverbial two cents.

I have a sick and sinking feeling that I’m expected to offer up something on-brand, some icon of Who I Am and What’s Meaningful to Me, and I have an even sicker feeling that Mencken & Co. think it should be *Gimme Danger*, Jim Jarmusch’s Stooges doc from 2016. As if Walt and I don’t both know that making art about artists freezes them in amber, puts them on permanent remove from the world of felt life. Which world has been the one I’ve tried to serve lo these many impecunious

years. So yeah, The Stooges, but no, not the Jarmusch. Instead, perversely enough, I'm going with *Almost Famous*, Cameron Crowe's 2000 rock-journalism fantasy about a local boy made — well, not good, but definitely famous, never mind the *Almost*. I've already written at length about my deep disregard for Crowe's crowing in these very pages, so the curious can satisfy themselves in the archives while the rest of us move along.

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That bloviating bootlick Polonius in *Hamlet* had less idea than most about the shape of the world and the levers required to move it, but if there's anything certain in this world, it's that God is kind to the very dumb, so maybe the gregarious gasbag accidentally drew some blood with that old saw, "To thine own self be true." Because as *Almost Famous* teaches us, kids, once you get past the confines of your own personal space, your own selfish self, the pleasant fictions better known as lies will win, and keep on winning, until the truth doesn't even matter any more. And after that, they'll be forgotten — and so will you. But all that is out there, and you can take

it or leave it. What you're stuck with — self-quarantined with — is yourself. And if you lie to that august personage, well, it's gonna be a long and uncomfortable sit. Maybe not at first, but as another Shakespearean scoundrel had it, "Truth will out."



WM: Thanks for the...good thoughts, Richard. I think longtime *Reader* movie critic Duncan Shepherd has a selection that follows somewhat naturally upon your observations. Duncan, a recent assessment by Nate Bell concluded that "what truly separates Shepherd from the pack" is that "there is nobody better at, or more committed to, describing the surface image of a film. The traces of this obsession (no other word will do) with picture quality were first evident in his 1974 master's thesis at UCSD. He wrote: 'The one constant fact of any movie is how it looks, not what it is superficially about, and not what it ultimately means, and certainly not — to put it with due skepticism — what initially it means to be about.'" And for our little viewing party, you've chosen *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, a film you described in your two-star review as "a witty and withering view of the home life of college professors and wives... shot in arty charcoal grays by Haskell Wexler."

Duncan Shepherd: I must issue a correction: I used the adjectives “witty and withering” to describe the Edward Albee play upon which Mike Nichols’ film was based. What is more, you chose that movie, and asked me to come over and talk about it as a favor to my former employer, a request I granted, despite its gimmicky air, mostly because they canceled March Madness this year and so I found myself with time on my hands. I hope that the *Reader’s* touching fondness for accuracy hasn’t diminished as much as all that since my departure.

WM: Fair enough; my apologies. Speaking of Wexler and his arty charcoal grays, he says in his audio commentary for the film that Nichols was responsible for the decision to shoot in black and white. He also talks about building a bridge over a bed so that he could shoot down on Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor as they looked up, “which was an angle you didn’t see too many of in films.”

DS: Let me do you the favor you asked in the manner I think you’d prefer. Yes, it’s a sort of God’s-eye-view, if God decided to get up close and personal with his creation after it hit the sack. And yes, it helps to add to the film’s air of oppressive atmosphere. It accentuates the trapped-ness of George and Martha, bound together by the view-finder’s inescapable frame, bound otherwise as well, perhaps least of all by their wedding vows and much more by their mutual animosities, addictions, self-loathing, and deceptions. And because it is God’s eye, it judges them, even as the film’s dialogue is careful to provide context, tea, and sympathy. Well, alcohol and sympathy. So the movie serves as a handy sort of *Illustrated Guide to the Dangers of Self-Quarantine*, even with, or perhaps especially with, one’s nearest and dearest. And yes again, the eventual removal of their mutual self-deception through an all-night violent verbal cage match echoes Mr. Meltzer’s promise of “an uncomfortable sit.” So while it remains a gimmicky selection, it’s not a terrible gimmick, except insofar as it’s always terrible to treat a movie as any kind of instrument of moral pedagogy.

WM: Well, except, as you mention, there is that illustrative force that comes from putting things onscreen. For an example, we turn now to Anne Albright, who wrote the Kid Stuff column about her growing family around the turn of the millennium. Anne, I understand you’d like to take this opportunity to address your kids?

Anne Albright: Yes, thanks, Walter. Who knows? This way, someone might see it and text them about it, and they’d actually pay attention. That’s a joke, by the way — though not the part about them paying attention to texts. Anyway: an open letter to my many children, living and now also attending school under one roof in the same house with their parents, paternal grandparents, uncle, and cousin.

- Turning and turning in the widening gyre
- The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
- Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
- Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...
- — William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Life is a constant struggle to keep it together in the face of universal entropy. Eventually, you will lose that struggle: your soul will separate from your body, and then the parts of your body, lacking that cohesive force that gives them oneness and form, will begin to separate from each other. Once the falcon cannot hear the falconer, you will become one of the things that falls apart. Life is what happens between now and then. There will be times when the idea of dissipation — of just letting things go their own way — will have great appeal. But successful living means keeping it together.

"Charity begins at home," goes the old saying. Here's a secret: so does its opposite. So does everything else. I've always told you that; now that you are stuck at home, you are going to learn it for yourself. You hate feeling cooped up; you want to go out into the world and live your life. Barring that, you want to be left alone as much as possible with your smartphone. But here is the truth: your life is not your own to live. You are part of something larger, the thing that made you and sustains you — this family. Crisis helps make that clear. You want to go off somewhere and dissipate, but successful living means keeping things together. Because if you head off and pick up a virus and bring it home, you could kill your grandparents, a serious failure on the family front.

And what's true at home is true in the larger world: it's the elderly and the compromised who are most at risk, and you are stuck with them in something larger than yourself called civilization — another thing that helped to make and sustain you. Civilizations and families fall apart, just like people. They endure and are successful insofar as we struggle to keep them together. It feels like an impingement, I know. That's because you still think that doing what you want is the most important thing.

My movie is M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs*, because of what happens when the family in it self-quarantines. In an attempt to comfort his family during a very scary time — an alien invasion — Dad asks his two kids and his younger brother what they want for dinner. Everyone asks for something different, including Dad. Everyone gets just what they want, but when we see them at dinner — from the vantage point of the exploded kitchen — nobody wants to eat. Dissipation sounded good, but it's not

what they need. What they need is to be a family. Happily, Dad figures that out, and while he and his brother barricade the house, he tells the kids about their births. He reminds them of their (deceased) mother, and of the love that brought them into the world and still sustains them.

So. Be kind to each other in this stressful time. Clean up after yourself. Give whatever help I ask for; better still, find ways to help without being asked. And when you're free to head out again, take what you learn here and carry it with you. Keep it together.

WM: Thanks, Anne; I bet those kids would have been glad to have you as their new mom. And as long as we're getting prescriptive, why don't we check in with Saffron, the *Reader's* very own advice columnist from the days after the Internet replaced the all-knowing Matthew Alice? What are you watching, Saffie?

Saffron: *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. It was John F. Kennedy who came up with the canard that "in the Chinese language, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters, one representing danger and the other, opportunity." Wikipedia helpfully corrects this to indicate that it's more like "danger at a point of juncture," but it also notes that the truthier meaning has spread throughout the world, even to some native Chinese speakers. Almost like a highly contagious virus brought to China by the U.S. Army, just like foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian suggested!

WM: Um, Saffron, the *Reader's* not on the list of American publications that get paid to run Chinese propaganda.

Saffron: It's not? Gosh, that's sad. I thought that's how print was staying afloat at this point. Getting back to crisis and opportunity. My advice for the present homebound moment is just this: don't waste it. Look at Alec Guinness in this film. He plays a British POW in a Japanese prison camp during World War II. It's not exactly self-quarantine, but he was ordered to surrender, so there are similarities. His men are then commanded to build a railway bridge for the Japanese to use, and so naturally, they do their worst work, hoping to sabotage the project. But Guinness sees things differently: as he says, "I know our men. You've got to keep them occupied." What's more, "It's essential that they should take pride in their job." The crisis — building a bridge for the enemy while in prison — becomes an opportunity. For preserving pride and dignity. For achieving excellence. For personal satisfaction.

WM: For aiding and abetting the enemy.

Saffron: Don't cloud the issue. The point here is that any period of enforced downtime is pure potential for doing something worthwhile. Look around your home for clues, little things that remind you of big projects that you never had time to tackle properly. Now you do. So tackle them. Don't fritter away the hours until they curdle and sour. Don't tell yourself how nice it is to have nothing you have to do, and use that as an excuse for doing nothing. It doesn't have to be something odious like deep cleaning or home repair — though both of those would be super-satisfying. Maybe you want to learn to paint landscapes. Maybe there's a big fat novel a friend gave you, hoping you'd read it and be up for a discussion. Maybe there's an idea for a screenplay rattling around in your brain, just waiting for this kind of downtime to find its way onto the page. Time is a gift. Don't waste it reading Twitter updates on Trump's handling of the pandemic and scrolling through Instagram accounts documenting empty public spaces. Who knows? Maybe by the time all this ends, you'll have found a new, slightly more directed, possibly more meaningful way to live. At the very least, you can get the gunk off the refrigerator shelves — you know, the sticky patch back behind the milk jugs.

WM: Ew, I hate that stuff. Still, it does bring up the subject of food — a real and necessary consideration as panic buying gives way to hoarding and Campbell's Soup, Inc. becomes the stock market's shining light amid the darkness. Judith Moore, besides serving as the *Reader's* senior editor for many years, you wrote countless articles for the us, and also several books — one of them, *Never Eat Your Heart Out*, a memoir built around food. There's a smorgasbord of great food movies out there; *Big Night*, *Babette's Feast*, *Eat Drink Man Woman*...

Judith Moore: I think I'll take *To Catch a Thief*.

WM: The Hitchcock film? Cary Grant as an ex-jewel thief living in the French Riviera?

JM: When we first see him, he's gardening at his hilltop villa. He's pruning his roses, but when he sees the police approaching, he puts down his shears and takes off his gloves. It's a wonderful garden, with low stone walls framing the dull yellow decomposed granite pathways lined with pots of fuschia chrysanthemums, and ornamental citrus trees casting little globs of shade. He has help around the house — a stout Frenchwoman who does his cooking and cleaning — but the gardening he reserves for himself. It's how I would like to retire: wealthy enough to live where I please and do what I like, and what I like is to make my roses bloom like mad.

WM: I admit I had forgotten about your yen for gardening, what with all the food writing.

JM: The two are entwined like lovers. I remember a piece I wrote on tomatoes...

WM: But *To Catch a Thief*? Is there even food in that movie — I mean, besides the picnic where Grace Kelly asks Grant if he'd like a leg or a breast?

JM: Of course there is: Grant's character has an insurance agent over for lunch. They begin with soup and rolls and move on to Quiche Lorraine. Everything is simple and delicious and in perfect good taste. That's how I prefer to think of French cooking, ever since *Mighty Dog*.

WM: I'm sorry, what?

JM: "In the little town where I lived so unhappily and happily for so many years, a day came when everyone 'went gourmet.' I can't tell you precisely when we went gourmet. I know that on a hot August Saturday night in 1977, when poor bloated Elvis had been dead only a few days, culinary progress had been such that our set was eating a meal that tasted as much of the names of dishes — à la this and that — as of food itself."

WM: That's from your book, right?

JM: "That year Reginald, an old friend of mine, was spending a lot of time around our house... He thought Coraville gourmet madness funny, and always wanted to hear about the latest dishes. One day one of us said to the other that if you gave it a French name, people happily would eat dog food. No sooner was this thought spoken than Reginald and I were throwing on coats and heading to Safeway... We bought onions, garlic, thick-sliced bacon, shelled pistachios, bread crumbs, and parsley" — and dog food. "The most acceptable, for texture and odor, were *Mighty Dog* and a Safeway house brand... By midnight, the pâté — or pet-té, as we were calling it — felt firm." That Friday, "not a soul, other than Sally, didn't spread thick smudges of *Mighty Dog* on the fresh bread we'd brought. Not a soul, including our trio of gastronomic leaders, didn't compliment *Mighty Dog*'s richness and the just-rightness of pistachios. The more *Mighty Dog* my friends ate, the dirtier a betraying Judas I felt... Almost 20 years down the road now, I still feel bad that I did this and wish I hadn't."

WM: Still, it's a great story.

JM: Perhaps one worth bearing in mind as the pantry starts to get bare in the coming weeks.

WM: Happy self-quarantine, everybody.

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